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SMALL PRINT AND BIG LOOPHOLES

YOU KNOW WHEN THAT WINDOW APPEARS on your desktop, insisting that you scroll through metres of tiny type before ticking the YES box to complete some transaction? Do you read it? Does anybody? Ninety-nine point nine per cent of us, me included, fast-forward and tick the box.

So it's easy to say that small print repays investigation, but harder to do. In any case, sometimes it's not what's in the text that matters, but what isn't.

Which brings me to insurance. A pain to pay for but necessary for peace of mind – as long as it's on your side when push comes to shove.

On our letters page a reader questions why he bothered to take out an extended travel policy for a liveaboard trip to Mexico. Circumstances wiped out most of the diving, yet he received no compensation from the insurer.

Not having read his small print I can't comment, but thanks to the apparent goodwill of the liveaboard operator, it seems that this reader may have been rather fortunate.

Stephen Martin's case is infinitely more serious than some lost dives. In September we reported that this BSAC club diver was awaiting extradition to Malta to face charges of involuntary homicide, following a diving incident in which his buddy/partner and another diver died.

I won't get into the ins and outs of this worrying case here, because as I write it remains *sub judice*. But this criminal charge tossed a firework into the rarely opened box of divers' third-party liability (TPL) insurance policies.

TPL won't buy you an emergency airlift or hyperbaric treatment, as more than a few divers seem to think it will. It's simply there to protect you in cases of personal injury or property damage for which you are liable.

BSAC's TPL insurance comes as standard, a key part of its membership offering. Divers are promised cover of up to £10 million "for legal costs and compensation awards arising from claims made against you for your negligence". It is rarely called upon, and even if the small print had been made public few members were likely to give it a second thought.

When Martin was arrested BSAC's insurer Liberty (there's irony in that name) refused to pay his claim for legal assistance. Why? Because the charges were not civil but *criminal*. That loophole must have been in the small print.

For BSAC divers heading abroad, suddenly TPL insurance was no longer a formality. Should they stick to dives led by a local centre? Should they sign waivers absolving a group leader of responsibility? Should they dive as buddy-pairs or even solo rather than as part of a group?

Protracted discussion between BSAC and its insurer and lawyers meant that the debate raged online longer than it might have done. Eventually the stable door was firmly shut with manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and culpable homicide added to the TPL policy for most parts of the (non-North American) diving world.

And, while accepting no liability, BSAC did the decent thing and offered to help Stephen Martin with his defence costs up to £100,000 out of club funds.

Small print? Unfortunately it took further stress on an already stressed-out diver to plug the hole in this particular benefit.

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CONTENTS

FEATURES



29

29 **Pride of Man**

Isle of Man diving? Outstanding, says Sue Daly



34

34 **In the Shadow of the Pitons**

Nigel Wade likes it laid-back, and he gets it in St Lucia

41 **Get the Most Out of...**

Simon Pridmore kicks off a new series with drift-diving

45 **DIVE 2015**

Your 12-page NEC Dive Show Planner starts here...



41

61 **Philippines**

...and your 24-page travel supplement starts here!

63 **Tiny Things, Big Wow!**

Macro-diving in Bohol

69 **Transcendant Tubbataha**

An adrenaline rush for Lisa Collins



75

72 **Booking Now Special**

Holiday ideas in the Philippines

75 **The Wrecks of Coron Bay**

John Liddiard is in his element

81 **Road to the Visayas**

Hotspots over land and sea, starting in Cebu



85

85 **Stop Stumblin' in the Dark**

25 dive-light beams compared in the Big Test

94 **Be the Champ!**

Alex Mustard tackles photography in a current

98 **Shark Bytes**

John Bantin on the pros and cons of shark-feeding



98



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Suite B, 74 Oldfield Road, Hampton,
Middlesex, TW12 2HR

Tel: 020 8941 8152

Email: enquiries@divermag.co.uk

Publisher & Editor-in-Chief

Nigel Eaton nigel@divermag.co.uk

Editor

Steve Weinman steve@divermag.co.uk

Publishing Consultant

Tony Weston tony@divermag.co.uk

Technical Editor

Nigel Wade divingnige@btinternet.com

News Editor

Paul Fenner paul@divermag.co.uk

Production Manager

George Lanham george@divermag.co.uk

Webmaster

Mike Busuttilli webmaster@divernet.com

Additional Design

Sean King sean@design-smk.co.uk

Advertisement Manager

Jenny Webb jenny@divermag.co.uk

Classified Advertisement Sales

Sara Duncan sara@divermag.co.uk

Senior Advertisement Executive

Alex Khachadourian alex@divermag.co.uk

Advertising Production

David Eaton david@divermag.co.uk

Subscriptions Manager

Elizabeth Puttock elizabeth@divermag.co.uk

Marketing, Sales & **DIVER** Bookshop

Dorothy Eaton dorothy@divermag.co.uk

Elizabeth Puttock uwp-mailshop@divermag.co.uk

Financial Controller

Kojo Gyamera kojo@divermag.co.uk

Reception

enquiries@divermag.co.uk

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Archaeology **Dave Parham**

Biology **Dr David Bellamy**

Industry **Dr John Bevan**

Law **Prof Mike Williams**

Medicine **Dr Ian Sibley-Calder**

Photography **Saeed Rashid, Brian Pitkin**

Ships **Richard Larn**

Wrecks **Rex Cowan**

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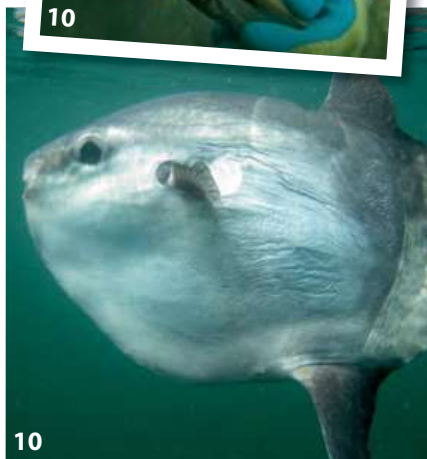
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CONTENTS

REGULARS

- 3 First In**
Editor's view
- 8 Off-Gassing**
Should you dive in a plaster-cast? and other letters
- 10 News**
350-year-old gun-carriage raised from Thames
- 26 Beachcomber**
A right royal dive qualification
- 59 Trewavas**
On swimming with whale sharks
- 115 Reviews**
Five new books you may or may not enjoy
- 119 Booking Now**
Diving holiday propositions around the world
- 122 Diver Tests**
Regulator, camera/housing and some roomy shorts
- 128 Just Surfaced**
New but untested diving products
- 130 Dive Holiday Directory**
- 132 Liveaboard Directory**
- 134 Classified Ads**
- 136 Dive Centre Directory**
- 136 Advertisers' Index**
- 137 Subscribe Here**
— and get a free Apeks diving watch!
- 138 Deep Breath**
Ralph Pannell on *that* whale shark video



Cover shot:
Diver with
damselfish in St Lucia,
by Nigel Wade

128



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DIVING IN A PLASTER CAST

As a longtime reader I would like to thank you for consistently putting out a varied and informative magazine. However, as a diver and A&E doctor I would like to express my alarm at reading *My Shark Week* (August).

At the beginning of the article, the author Lisa Collins mentions having had wrist surgery two weeks previously and being concerned that she would not be able to dive.

While I am sure that she sought appropriate medical advice and informed her insurance company before travelling, no mention of this is made in the article!

Instead the author states that she "took advice from friends", describing how a water-resistant cast cover can be used to dive with a plaster cast, and even including a photo of said cast.

I am concerned that this article may encourage divers who have had recent surgery and/or are in plaster casts to think that it is perfectly safe to jump straight back in the water without obtaining proper medical advice from a qualified dive doctor, and without checking that the relevant insurance cover is still valid.

Diving soon after injury or surgery is often possible but it must be done with appropriate care and consideration to avoid causing harm. I would be grateful if you would clarify this to your readers.

DR MELANIE THORNTON, NEWPORT,
ISLE OF WIGHT

Lisa Collins comments: I had had surgery on a tendon five and a half weeks before the trip and still had to wear a cast to keep my wrist stable. I sought medical advice as well as that of friends, including very experienced diving instructors, a marine biologist and a high-ranking member of the Marine Corps.

I was told that had I had a break there would be an increased risk of the bends in the fracture site. However, the only concern in my case was the risk of getting the incision site wet. Sea water is full of potentially harmful micro-organisms that could degrade the wound site.

Given the time elapsed since surgery, they felt there was very little risk. Had it been six weeks they would have been happy for me to dive with just the waterproof cast, but I decided to act cautiously.

As there was no risk of infection with fresh water, the solution was to use a waterproof cast, applied by a medical professional well-briefed on what I intended to do, with a drysuit sleeve into which fresh water could be put at the surface to allow for pressure differentials and keep sea water out on the dive. I applaud the medical team for coming up with a solution to an unusual problem.

I apologise if my article was misleading – there



MICHAEL KRUEGER



was little space for a detailed explanation.

There are clear indicators that people should

not dive with broken bones, and I would always encourage divers to seek relevant medical advice before diving with any type of injury.

Giving it some stick

I would like to lodge my concerns relating to the increasing popularity of the ubiquitous miniature movie cameras with the now equally ubiquitous selfie-stick attachment – may I, through the pages of this fine journal, make a simple request?

If you must take one of these cameras on your dive holiday (and why shouldn't you?), please keep it out of my face. By all means, hold it close to your body. Feel free to strap it to your head, where it will record every second of your dive experience, in the event that simple memories fail you.

But if there are divers ahead of you trying to take carefully composed digital images, or perhaps simply hanging in the blue, waiting for a shot of that one big beastie of the day, please don't stick your damn pole where it's not wanted!

SIMON BENJAMIN, BSAC NO 1, LONDON



You know what you can do with that stick...

Gold insurance – why?

My son Kris and I have been diving for around 17 years and have subscribed to **DIVER** for most of them. I read Jo Caird's article *Risky Business* (June) about the diving insurance minefield.

Last year I booked a trip to the Socorro Islands in the east Pacific on the new *Nautilus Belle Amie* through tour operator The Scuba Place. Departure date was 15 April and the total cost of the holiday was just shy of £8000.

I normally buy annual holiday cover as we get away around three times a year. I decided to take out a new insurance policy with Club Direct, with which I had insured before. I took out Gold annual insurance with the addition of diving to 50m (extra premium).

On 12 April we overnighted at Heathrow and flew to Dallas the next day. After overnighting there we flew down to Cabo and stayed in a hotel before joining the boat at 8am on the 15th.

The boat was due out of port at 9am. Because of fumes in the engine-room this was adjusted to mid-day but we didn't leave port until around 9pm.

Getting up at around 7am next morning, we found that we were back in Cabo Bay. About three hours out a cooling water-pump to an engine had broken down. No replacement could be located so a fire water-pump was adapted to do the job. Our journey was resumed at around 3pm on the 16th.

We arrived at Roca Partida around 2pm on the 17th and got two fantastic dives in.

Next morning we did two more before two of the boat's three generators failed and we had to return to Cabo. We had done only four of the scheduled 28 dives. We spent the rest of the holiday in a hotel in Cabo (paid for by Nautilus) before returning home on 24 April.

Nautilus provided all guests with a letter stating the cause of cancellation (*force majeure*) and The Scuba Place gave us a cancellation letter stating the holiday costs.

Back home I phoned the insurance company, which immediately said that we were not covered. I asked for a form anyway so that it could assess the claim and respond in the proper manner.

I submitted this with all the receipts and letters. The insurer replied almost immediately, stating that cancellation wasn't covered because the trip was not cancelled before the departure date and curtailment wasn't covered as we had stayed in Cabo and got our scheduled flights home.

What about the additional diving premium I had paid for? I asked. It states in the policy that the winter-sports premium covers days lost due to lack of snow, broken chairlifts etc, so I would have

expected something similar for diving, but there is no mention in any of the documentation of what is covered by the inclusion of diving to 50m.

Club Direct uses a company called Intana to assess any claims and I have been playing email ping-pong with them both. Intana recently stated that it has "no details of the selling of a policy or what the intentions are," only that there is no wording in the policy document covering the events that occurred, so we are not covered.

It has apologised and passed my claim on to its complaints department. It also says that it believes the responsibility lies with the tour operator(s).

In my last salvo to Club Direct four weeks ago I asked it to identify the unforeseen eventualities covered by the addition of the diving endorsement.

No reply to date, so I suspect it has gone to its legal people to formulate a response. Intana has advised that after eight weeks I can take the complaint to the Ombudsman, which I will do.

In a Facebook conversation with a guest "Captain Mike", the Nautilus owner, committed to provide a free place on one of his vessels and cover return airfare costs.

We have now rebooked on *Belle Amie* for next year and at the request of Nautilus I provided it with the costs of the booked airfares – after negotiation most of these costs plus incidental costs incurred in Cabo have been reimbursed. Jill at Nautilus has been an absolute pleasure to deal with.

It will probably be some months before I get any satisfactory resolution to this issue but I will keep nibbling away at the insurance company.

ROBERT, WEST BROMWICH

You can come out now!

I read Lisa Collins' article *Wow! Moments* (June) and thought my experience might be of interest. At the tender age of 67 I have taken up diving and reached the first rung on the ladder, Scuba Diver level.

I am healthy, fit and can swim but never previously felt at home in the water. I spend a lot of time in Cyprus and one afternoon was invited to attend a Discover Scuba demonstration in a swimming pool.

I watched the participants with interest and anticipation. Towards the end of the afternoon the instructors asked if anyone else would like to take part, so I decided to take the plunge.

Having received the briefing and kitted up, off I went. The wow factor certainly kicked in, and I couldn't believe the feeling of complete freedom that being under water gave me.

The instructors eventually had to fetch me out of the pool, as they wanted to clear away and go home.

Shortly after this I joined a group of volunteers who clean the beaches in the Pernera and Protaras areas of southern Cyprus during the winter months. The clean-ups are organised by Rich, who runs Cyprus Dive Centre, and chatting to him got me started. I was soon enjoying every dive and diving experience.

Rich is very thorough, very patient and has a good sense of humour. I am now progressing on to Open Water level, and would suggest that any senior citizen in good health should have a go and enjoy.

GEOFF DRAKE, KIBWORTH HARCOURT, LEICS

Learning from mistakes

Reading the news sections of the magazine brings to light the number of dive-related accidents that occur both at home and abroad.

In my experience as a yachtsman (as well as a diver) education of past incidents can often serve as the best prevention of the incident occurring again and helps agencies to update their systems accordingly. While the yachting community has the Marine Accident Investigation Board reports to help learn from other people's mistakes, to my knowledge there doesn't appear to be any equivalent for divers.

Surely an investigative public forum would serve

to prevent similar incidents from occurring and would support PADI, BSAC and other dive agencies in promoting safer diving around the world.

JAMES BARKER. RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA,

Comment: We assume that you're aware of BSAC's long-standing Annual Incidents Report but you may also be interested in the work of Cognitas Incident Research & Management, run by technical diver Gareth Lock (right), who has used his experience as a serving RAF officer to set up the Diving Incident & Safety Management System (DISMS) for reporting. Its stated aim is to "improve diving safety by challenging current practices and encourage a Just Culture using experience and processes from the aviation and medical industries", cognitasresearch.wordpress.com



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Got something diving-related you'd care to share? Email steve@divermag.co.uk, including your name and postal address – and please confirm that you're writing exclusively to **DIVER**



The dive-team with the gun-carriage.



The gun-carriage emerges after 350 years.

Centuries-old warship's gun-carriage raised

A HISTORICALLY PRICELESS wooden gun-carriage has been raised from the wreck of the mid-17th-century warship *London* off Southend Pier, in the Thames Estuary.

The well-preserved 350-year-old piece was raised in mid-August by Historic England, working with Cotswold Archaeology and licensed divers led by the wreck's designated protection licensee, Steve Ellis.

The recovery is the latest in a two-year diving programme aimed at surveying the wreck-site and raising items regarded as at risk of degradation, factors including changing currents and increasingly abundant sea-worms due to climate change.

The gun-carriage, weighing about a ton, was lifted from a depth of 20m by a crane barge, with divers in attendance. An axle with wheels on which it sat was also raised.

The pieces were landed at Leigh-on-Sea and transported to York, where they will be conserved over the next year by York Archaeological Trust.

Alison James, Historic England Maritime Archaeologist, described the gun-carriage as "complete with all the implements that the gunner would have used to make the cannon fire – all the archaeological material is there with it, so it's hugely exciting".

"Until now it's been well-preserved, enclosed in an anaerobic environment, oxygen-free mud, safe from all the creepy-crawlies that would normally erode it," she added. "We've even got the 350-year-old rope going through the pulley block."

"But as parts of the gun-carriage recently became exposed, we had to act fast to save it."

John Dillon, Project Manager at Cotswold Archaeology, said: "While the hull of the ship will remain on the seabed for the foreseeable future, the

Reconstruction of the *London*.

recovery and display of vulnerable artefacts such as this will aid our understanding of life on board a warship 350 years ago."

Steve Ellis said: "Being involved in guiding this rare piece of history to the surface was very special, the sort of experience every diver and maritime archaeologist dreams of."

The *London*, which lies in two parts, blew up in March 1665 after gunpowder stored on board caught fire during a journey from Chatham to the Hope, near Gravesend in Kent.

The ship was on its way to collect final supplies after being mobilised to take part in the second Anglo-Dutch War of 1665-7. ■

BSI PUBLISHES GUIDANCE ON REBREATHING SCRUBBERS

A BRITISH STANDARD has been published for CO₂-absorbent materials used in rebreathing equipment employed professionally and by recreational divers.

Failure to load the appropriate quality of material can lead to insufficient absorption and a harmful incident. BS 8618 defines the required performance of the material and

standardises methods for assessing granular or pelleted materials against a set of test procedures.

"This standard provides the requirements and test methods for carbon dioxide absorbent materials, and allows users to select the appropriate materials for their intended application," says Anthony Burd, Head of Construction at BSI.

"BS 8618 is not just about citing important technical specifications but also provides best-practice guidance that will better safeguard the lives of divers. This is something BSI and our committee members take very seriously. In this case we are better safeguarding those who work in the military, emergency services, commercial and recreational

diving industries."

BS 8618 has, says the BSI, been developed "using a collaborative consensus-based approach, with input from experts across industry, government, academia and more".

Contributing organisations included the British Safety Industry Federation, Health & Safety Executive and the Ministry of Defence. ■

'DOC DEEP' DIES ON 365M RECORD BID

A **VIRGIN ISLANDS** diver died in mid-August after attempting to set a Guinness World Record for the Deepest Salt Water Scuba Dive.

Dr Guy Garman, a medical doctor on the island of St Croix, made the attempt off the island at the weekend.

Garman, known to colleagues as "Doc Deep", was aiming to reach the depth of 365m (1200ft), which would have broken the record of 332m set by

Egyptian Ahmed Gabr of Dahab in September 2014.

St Croix's Scuba Tec dive centre, which provided back-up for the dive, has stated that, on descent, Garman was accompanied by support divers to a depth of 61m.

He was then expected to meet up with his deep support divers at a depth of 110m after about 38 minutes, but he never reappeared. ■

St Abbs loses its lifeboat



No more — the St Abbs lifeboat.

BERWICKSHIRE'S ST ABBS

RNLI lifeboat station was due to close on 8 September, as **DIVER** went to press just days earlier.

The St Abbs station's Atlantic 75 B-class inshore RIB was being taken out of operation despite a petition with some 3000 signatures protesting the move.

The RNLI's nearby Eyemouth station was due to take over responsibility for lifeboat launches. It was to get an inshore lifeboat to supplement its existing Trent-class all-weather craft.

Despite Eyemouth's close proximity to St Abbs, anti-closure campaigners have maintained that, in certain weather conditions, the time to reach a casualty in the St Abbs area will be increased by some 15 minutes.

Such a time difference will be sufficient to affect survivability for

certain types of casualty, they say.

St Abbs is a popular diving area and incidents involving decompression illness can be crucially time-dependent in getting a casualty to treatment fast enough to optimise the chances of recovery.

George Rawlinson, RNLI Operations Director, said: "The RNLI recognises and respects depth of feeling concerning the decision to withdraw the lifeboat from St Abbs.

"However, while we understand that it's disappointing for those involved in St Abbs lifeboat station, the difficult decision taken by the RNLI's trustees to withdraw the lifeboat was unanimous.

"The charity is committed to putting another lifeboat at Eyemouth to cover St Abbs, which is only two nautical miles away and this has already been done." ■

THE BIG QUESTION

Feeling safe

Is the threat of global terrorism affecting your choice of dive destinations? we asked you last month. Although the question is slightly different it echoes the very first *Big Question* in early 2004, when the "War on Terror" was comparatively new, and we asked if the threat of terrorism had put you off overseas diving trips.

Ninety-five per cent of you answered in the negative then, but 11 years on you aren't quite so adamant, with only 54% of you now saying it has made no difference to your choices. It may also be that more divers combine their sport with a family holiday these days too, so are more cautious about their destination choices.

YES

"When diving is combined with family holidays." James Harris

"I am not inclined to tempt fate unnecessarily." Ken Cooper

"As I'm a serving soldier, the Middle East and North Africa are completely out. I'd think twice about Turkey too." Anthony

"PADI continually refers to diving in Sipadan after completing one of its courses, despite an FCO warning that invalidates any/all insurance. I have pointed this out but it has made no difference." Gerry Moore

"I was going to dive at Oban this year but am now seriously reconsidering." Paul Smith

NO

"You can never tell if/when it's going to happen, so why let it put you off a good dive destination?" Scott Warren

"I can't afford to go abroad to dive anyway!" Charlotte Fleming

"I feel just as likely to be subject to a terrorist attack in London as anywhere abroad. Don't let them get to you!" Richard Butcher

"So long as the FCO has not declared somewhere unsafe, my travelling will not change. Modifying my behaviour as a result of any terrorist activity is simply meeting any demands they're making." David Tillotson

"No, but I do review travel advisories etc to be aware of a specific threat to an area and any additional precautions to take." Trevor Flanagan

"If we don't go, they will have won!" Mike McLaren

"Within Foreign Office guidelines, otherwise not insured." Martin

"Currently not but it may do." Paul Nicholas

"If you don't go on holiday the bastards have won, and the only people that suffer is the population of the destination, as we don't spend our money in the local economy." Andrew Whittle

"If you live that way the terrorist wins!" Terry Hodgins

"I will always do as I want to – I'll perhaps be a little more observant and cautious but will still go." John Gray

"I could avoid all risks of global terrorism if I stayed in bed all day. I will continue to travel to my favourite diving destinations." Helen Acton

"Not yet, but let's be sensible. It's just a hobby, after all..." Ken Ruiz

"Only if the Foreign Office advised against going there. So far that has never happened when I've been planning a trip." Philip Medcalf

"No way. They can't get you when under water." Matt Shippam

"I believe the chance of getting caught up is actually very slim." Jonathan Webb

Go to www.divernet.com to answer the next *Big Question* and you could win a £118 Luxfer 3-litre compact emergency pony cylinder from Sea & Sea. More on Luxfer cylinders at www.dive-team.com. Latest winner is Adrian Hill of Kirkby-in-Ashfield.



THE NEXT BIG QUESTION

Do you often hire dive-gear rather than using your own?

Answer yes or no, and feel free to comment



Police divers show their mettle

WHEN A DIVER visiting the popular location St Abbs in Berwickshire accidentally dropped his £800 Suunto Eon Steel computer into the depths, it was not any old group that responded to the challenge of finding it again.

For Andy Bailey's 11 diving chartering companions were mainly serving or retired police officers – with a good half-dozen being working or

decommissioned police divers.

Paul Crowe of St Abbs Diving, who ran the trip, noted the position and agreed to ferry the group out to the site again the next day to conduct a search for the valuable box of electronics, which had fallen back down onto a reef in 18-20m of water.

"Paul expertly threw a shot in as close as possible to the waypoint he had marked, and the police divers formulated a plan," Andy Thom, of the

Metropolitan Police Dive Team, told **DIVER**.

"Everybody would go to the bottom of the shot and a distance-line would be clipped on. The group would go round in a circle in a clockwise direction while the line was slowly paid out, and once the end of the line was reached everybody would continue 2m apart in a line, as a continuation of the distance-line."

After half an hour's activity Martin

Spirito, a Met diving colleague of Thom's, found the missing computer hidden in a gully at 21m.

"Thank God," said Thom. "The police divers in the group would never have heard the last of it if someone else in the group had found it."

The computer showed a massive decompression requirement, he added, and clearly did not enjoy "being brought to the surface straight away after 24 hours at 21m..." ■

Hood bell sees light of day

THE BELL OF THE BRITISH WW2 battlecruiser HMS Hood has been raised from the wreck 2800m down in the North Atlantic.

Funded by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, the ROV operation was carried out by British-based deep-sea salvor Blue Water Recoveries, headed by David Mearns.

The bell is reported to be in good condition and, after conservation over a year or so, is expected to go on display at the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth.

Its recovery followed Mearns' 2012 attempt to retrieve the bell, called off due to bad weather and technical

complications. Mearns found the Hood in 2001.

HMS Hood was the largest British warship ever lost in action and saw the RN's worst loss of life from a single ship during WW2, when it was sunk while engaging Germany's Bismarck in the Denmark Strait in 1941. The ship blew up after its main magazine was hit and detonated.

Only three of the 1418 men on board survived. One, Ordinary Signalman Ted Briggs, who died in 2008, was reported often to have expressed a wish that the bell be raised and displayed as a public memorial to the ship's lost crew. ■

Spanish wrecks yield gold

DIVERS HAVE RECOVERED an estimated US \$4.5 million's worth of gold coins from the wreckage of one or more early 18th-century Spanish galleons off Florida's Atlantic Coast.

Boat skipper Jonah Martinez and divers William Bartlett and Dan Beckingham raised 35 coins in two days from a site that forms part of a collection of 11 treasure-laden Spanish ships wrecked 300 years ago while sailing from Havana to Spain.

The state of Florida takes 20% of raised finds for display in a museum in Tallahassee, after which proceeds from sales are shared equally between whoever finds and recovers the

treasure wreck and the salvage company Queens Jewels.

The company, owned by Brent Brisben, holds rights to the 1715 fleet shipwreck site, bought from the family of treasure-hunter the late Mel Fisher.

Earlier in the summer, other divers raised gold coins worth around \$1m from a site just south of the latest find.

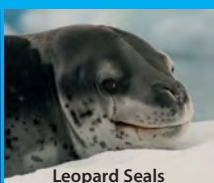
Each year, between 10 and 25 subcontractors sign up with Queens Jewels to carry out seabed searches.

An estimated \$400 million-worth of coins is thought still to lie in the coastal wreck zone known as Florida's Treasure Coast, which runs from Melbourne to Fort Pierce. ■

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DIVER JAILED FOR TAKING CANNON

A COMMERCIAL DIVER

has been sentenced to two years in prison and ordered to pay £35,000 in costs after being convicted of illegal possession of three 16th century Dutch cannon and their fraudulent sale.

Vincent Woolsgrove of Ramsgate, Kent pleaded guilty at Southampton Crown Court in mid-June in relation to cannon raised from the wreck of HMS *London* in the Thames Estuary.

Woolsgrove reported the raising of five cannon back in 2007 – two bronze items from the *London*, which was true, and the three Dutch pieces, 24-pounders originally from Amsterdam.

He claimed that the latter had been raised off North Foreland, in international waters, so avoiding transfer of ownership to the British Government.

Having been awarded title to the three Dutch cannon, Woolsgrove sold them at auction for £50,000 to an American private buyer.

In 2011 a joint operation was undertaken by the MCA, Kent & Essex Police and Historic England, acting on information regarding heritage crime. A search warrant was obtained and Woolsgrove's house searched.

In his garden the MCA found a bronze 16th century Zeirikzee cannon in a desalination tank and other wreck items including copper, lead, tin and glass ingots, and ships' bells.

Woolsgrove also admitted having two unreported bronze cannon from an Armada wreck, at his girlfriend's home.

The breakthrough regarding the Dutch cannon reported as being raised off North Foreland came with discovery of photos on his computer showing the cannon being recovered off Southend, from the *London* site.

Expert research commissioned by the MCA established that the cannon recovered by Woolsgrove had ended up on the *London*. They were originally issued to the Dutch vessels *Groote Liefde* and *St Mattheus* to attack the English fleet during the first Anglo-Dutch War in 1653. When the ships were captured by the English, their cannon were taken as prizes and put aboard the *London*.

Asked if further prosecution was possible regarding the other illegal finds uncovered, the MCA said that "ongoing investigations" remained. ■



Sunfish in St Ives Bay.

PETER MILLS

Divers gather evidence for conservation zones

FIVE PROFESSIONAL DIVERS and marine ecologists have carried out a series of underwater surveys at selected English sites, under commission by The Wildlife Trusts.

Throughout the summer the team, led by Plymouth-based marine scientist Dominic Flint, surveyed and photographed sands and gravels, rocks, seaweeds and marine creatures, with the aim of gathering data for conservation assessments.

"By deploying a dive team, we hope to be able to propose new areas for inclusion in the third phase of Marine Conservation Zones, which should be designated in 2016," said Richard White, Devon Wildlife Trust's Senior Marine Conservation Officer.

"Gathering data in the marine environment is notoriously difficult and time-consuming. We hope our activity will help to strengthen the

existing evidence base and provide information about areas where little or nothing is currently known.

"We have to do this to ensure that these places can be included in future discussions over marine protection, and their conservation secured.

"This will be our last opportunity to secure an ecologically coherent network in England."

The team has started in the south-west of England and plans to move along the Channel and into the North Sea, where it is hoped new and exciting marine life will be found.

The dives, which continued as **DIVER** went to press at the beginning of September, have included Plymouth Sound, the Manacles Marine Conservation Zone off the Lizard peninsula and St Ives Bay in north Cornwall. They will be resumed in 2016. www.wildlifetrusts.org ■



Kelp forest, St Ives Bay.

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Deaths at home and abroad

TWO BRITISH DIVERS have lost their lives, in incidents off the North Sea coast of Bridlington and off south-east Spain.

Diane Cuthbertson, 59, from Hutton Cranswick, Yorkshire, got into difficulties after completing a dive to 30m in Bridlington Bay in late August.

A member of the SAA's Filey Brigg branch, she is reported to have ascended normally with her buddy before indicating that she was out of air, and losing consciousness within 3m of the surface.

She was taken aboard her dive-boat still breathing and was airlifted by Coastguard helicopter to Hull Royal Infirmary, where it was confirmed that she had died.

Examination of her equipment showed that it still contained breathing gas. As **DIVER** went to press, the cause of death was still to be determined and an inquest was announced by the coroner in Hull.

Neil Fears, 51, from Derbyshire, went missing while diving on the 60m-deep wreck of the WW1 British

steamship *Stanfield*, near La Manga sports resort in south-eastern Spain's Murcia region.

It was reported that, while diving in a group of four, Fears lost contact with the others and failed to surface.

An air and sea search was launched, and Fears' body was located by police search divers on the seabed not far from the wreck.

★ **The body of Briton Timothy Chu, 27, who went missing while diving off Vancouver Island, Canada in July**

(**News, September**), was found in late August.

The diver's remains were spotted floating in the sea by a fisherman. They were recovered and, after examination, were confirmed as those of Chu by the British Columbia Coroners Service.

Chu's Hong Kong-based family has called for tighter controls in sport diving that could save lives, including obligatory carriage of surface marker buoys and GPS locator beacons. ■



Ben Fogle.

BEN'S ADVENTURES WITH A DEAD WHALE

A **FILM TEAM** including presenter Ben Fogle towed a whale carcass for several days through Celtic Deep, between Wales and Ireland, in late August to see which species of marine animal would feed off it.

Speaking to press after the exercise the team, working for ITV, confirmed that the remains had attracted sharks – but not, as had been hoped for in some quarters, a great white.

Before the tow, John Richardson of the Shark Trust commented: "This is certainly an exciting project, possibly unprecedented in British waters; however, the likelihood of encountering a white shark is incredibly low."

The team did not divulge full results of the tow, in which cameras were attached to the whale. Its findings are due for screening in an autumn documentary.

The decomposing whale was likely to attract shark species such as the blue, porbeagle, shortfin mako and thresher.

The whale, which stranded in north-east Scotland in June, was donated by the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme.

It was transported to Wales, where it was conserved in liquid nitrogen before being taken to sea for the filmed experiment. ■

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Support gathers for diver facing extradition

A **BRITISH DIVER** who has faced extradition and appearance in a Maltese court, in order to answer a charge of involuntary homicide over a twin fatality while diving in Gozo in June 2014, was still awaiting news over the next stage in proceedings as **DIVER** went to press at the beginning of September.

Stephen Martin, 55, from Rustington, West Sussex, has remained tagged, required to report to a police station three times a day and made to observe a night-time curfew since his arrest in early July and receipt of charges from a Gozo magistrate's court (*News*, September).

Martin confirmed to **DIVER** at the end of August that he had not yet received any date for extradition, nor for any court hearing in Malta.

He confirmed also that, having appealed successfully in July for a delay in the extradition date, his lawyer had now lodged an appeal at the High Court in London against the extradition *per se*, with three barristers who happened to be active on diving Internet forums having offered to represent him for free.

It was possible that the British court would reject the Maltese arrest warrant, although that would mean that Martin would not be able to set foot in Malta and some other countries again.

Further, Martin said that his local MP, Sir Peter Bottomley, had taken an interest in his plight and was due to meet the Maltese High Commissioner around mid-September to ask that the case be re-examined before any extradition took place.

Having been briefed on the case, Bottomley was willing to express the view that Martin should not be charged with any offence over an incident that, he said, appeared simply to have been a very sad fatal accident over which it would be wrong to apportion blame.

Bottomley confirmed that he had brought the case to the attention of Martin's MEP, Daniel Hannan, the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the Crown Prosecution Service to help Martin receive further support.

A successful intervention by Bottomley and a complete withdrawal of charges was the best-case scenario and where "my hopes are", said Martin.

Meanwhile pressure on the authorities in Malta had been mounting from their own people, according to Martin.

"The Malta Tourist Authority and Professional Diving School Association are lobbying the Maltese government because so many divers are cancelling holidays and all schools are deeply concerned with the Maltese action," he said.

In the British sport diving community, shock waves from the charges laid before Martin swept



Stephen Martin.

through the British Sub-Aqua Club's membership and central headquarters through July and August. Martin's holiday had been with his local BSAC branch.

Internet forums lit up with divers worried about the cover afforded them by the club's standard third-party liability insurance policy. At least one group did not allow their concerns to stop them heading for Malta, with three instructors and four dive leaders ready to share organisational responsibilities.

In late August the BSAC moved to include manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and culpable homicide in its TPL policy and announced that £100,000 in club funds had been earmarked for Martin's legal representation (see *First In*). ■

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Divers raise figurehead from 500-year-old wreck

SEA-MONSTER FIGUREHEAD has been raised by divers from the wreck of a 15th-century Danish warship in the Baltic Sea, off southern Sweden.

The wooden piece comes from the wreck of the Danish royal ship

Gribshunden, believed to have sunk in 1495 after succumbing to a fire on board as it voyaged from Copenhagen to Kalmar, in eastern Sweden.

"It has the appearance of the grimacing head of a dog or other monstrous animal, and may depict the

very "grip dog" that the name of the ship reflects," said a spokesman for the Blekinge Museum in Karlskrona, where the figurehead is being conserved.

"No similar item from the 15th century has ever been found anywhere in the world."



The 'grimacing' figurehead.

BLEKINGE MUSEUM/SUSANNE STRÖM

Sport-divers found the wreck in the 1970s but the museum says it was "several decades" before it was identified as the *Gribshunden*, which belonged to the Danish King Hans.

She had anchored in Ronneby as the king made his way to Kalmar to negotiate the Kalmar Union, but sank after catching fire accidentally.

The wreck, a protected site accessible only under licence, has been described as the oldest armed naval vessel to have been found in the Nordic oceans, and as possibly the best-preserved 15th century ship in the world.

The figurehead recovery was a collaborative project by Blekinge Museum and MARIS/Södertörn University, with the involvement of Marin Mätteknik (MMT), the UK's University of Southampton, the Swedish Defence University, Danish Combat Archaeology and the Kalmar County Museum. ■

Dolphin spy?

THE PALESTINIAN HAMAS group said recently that it had captured a dolphin off Gaza that it claimed had been trained to spy for Israel.

As reported by *Al-Quds* newspaper, Hamas said the creature was found and brought ashore with devices including cameras attached to it. The use of the animal was, it said, in response to the formation of a Hamas naval unit.

The Israeli government did not respond to the claim. ■

LONG TIME DOWN

A MALTESE DIVER has broken the Guinness World Record for the Longest Open Saltwater Scuba Dive (cold water).

Daniel Sammut spent 13hr 22min submerged in water of 14° C and at a depth of 11m in Malta's St Paul's Bay.

The dive was carried out on 19 March but was confirmed by Guinness only in August. It beat the previous mark of 12hr 34min. ■

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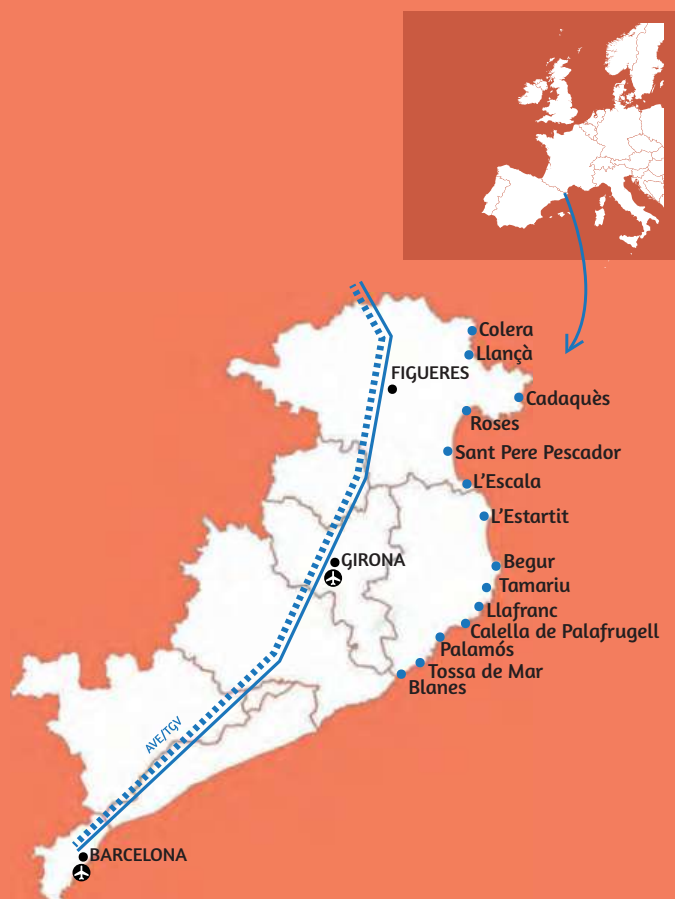


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Bronze statuette of a pharaoh.

Divers' ancient Egyptian discoveries go on show

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN treasures recovered by divers over a period of 10 years from the sunken cities of Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus have gone on display in Paris.

The cities succumbed to the sea in the 8th century AD and lie across a 40sq-mile area in Aboukir Bay, near Alexandria.

They were excavated by the French marine archaeologist Franck Goddio, founding head of Paris's European Institute for Underwater Archaeology, who made the initial discovery of the cities in 2000.

Goddio worked with the

Egyptian authorities and with the UK's Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology at the University of Oxford to raise, conserve, catalogue and prepare for exhibition the wide array of finds, ranging from tiny statuettes and personal effects to major stone pieces.

The exhibition, *Osiris, Sunken Mysteries of Egypt*, features nearly 300 items and runs at the Arab World Institute in Paris until 31 January.

★ A submerged Bronze Age Greek city has been discovered in Kiladha Bay on the Peloponnese

peninsula, south of Athens, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs announced in late August.

The 12-acre, 4500-year-old site was found by researchers from the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities, the University of Geneva and the Swiss School of Archaeology, while they were searching for something else.

Identified so far have been a series of large, semi-circular foundations running off a wall and thought to be the bases of defence towers, paved areas and artefacts including tools and pottery. ■



'Wedjat eye' of Horus.



Oil lamp.



Ceramic of the god Bes.



Fragment of the 'Naos of the Decades'.

NOVEL USE FOR A TOOTHBRUSH

MARINE RESEARCHERS

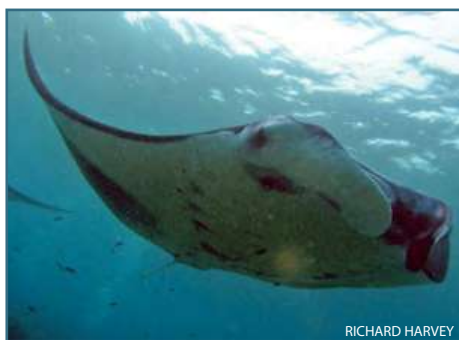
have devised a new method of DNA collection from manta rays which is physically unobtrusive – and just about the simplest technique imaginable.

Diving scientists from the Marine Megafauna Foundation used toothbrushes to take mucus samples from the rays' skins, instead of deploying more typical spears with biopsy punch tips.

The first test samples were taken as long ago as September 2012 but a conclusion on the technique's viability was published only in mid-August this year.

Using handheld or pole-mounted toothbrushes, the scuba-diving researchers collected samples from 18 mantas off Ecuador's Isla de la Plata.

Subsequent analysis of the material established that it "can reliably be



RICHARD HARVEY

used in population genetic studies", said the MMF.

The project was the "first to test the feasibility of this sampling method in the wild, creating new opportunities for this technique to be applied to other elasmobranch species".

The report, *Evaluating Manta Ray Mucus as an Alternative DNA Source for Population Genetics Study: Underwater-Sampling, Dry-Storage and PCR Success*, is published by the US journal *PeerJ* at peerj.com/articles/1188 ■

Italians take to scooters



TWO DIVERS have crossed Italy's Strait of Messina using underwater scooters.

In late August Italians Cosimo

Muscianisi, 30 and Dario Polimeni, 52 covered the two-mile stretch from Punta del Faro in Sicily to Cannitello on the mainland in 1hr 30min, which was longer than expected because of strong currents in the area.

Throughout the journey, the divers remained at depths of 6-10m. Eight months of planning went into the dive.

DAN Europe carried out physiological tests on the divers before and after the crossing, with results to be analysed as part of the DAN Diving Safety Lab research project. ■



Lawyer Dario Polimeni and doctor Cosimo Muscianisi celebrate.

Survey help for developers

NEW GUIDELINES have been published in a bid to better protect sea mammals from possible hazards connected with wave and tidal energy developments.

They have been prepared by the University of St Andrews' Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), SMRU Consulting, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Scottish Association of

Marine Sciences (SAMS).

The guidance has been prepared, in the first instance, to outline marine-mammal surveying requirements at a number of energy sites off the Welsh coast. Of concern are the possibly detrimental effects of noise and harm caused by moving parts.

"It is our duty to ensure that marine mammals such as dolphins, porpoises

and seals in Wales are protected," said Ceri Morris, Marine Mammal Specialist at NRW. "This new guidance will give us more confidence that we have the best available information on marine-mammal distribution and help us to understand how animals may interact with wave and tidal devices to inform our advice."

Dr Kate Smith, Marine Renewables Advisor at NRW, said: "We will be encouraging developers of wave and tidal-stream energy projects to work with us in the future to follow the risk-assessment process outlined in this report in order to determine the survey needs for a project."

"This process will identify which impact pathways might result in potentially significant impacts to marine mammals and which impacts and species should be the focus of any pre-application survey."

"This process will ensure that developers are in a much better position to make well-informed decisions about survey and the need for data to inform environmental assessments and consent decisions."



Better protection is being sought for marine mammals like these seals.

Colossus cordage investigated

FOLLOWING AN ACT of vandalism on the dive trail of the protected wreck *Colossus* off Plymouth in Devon, a police investigation remained open as **DIVER** went to press at the start of September, a month after the incident.

Reams of cordage had been strewn around the trail, entangling artefacts and at least 10 of the site's submerged-buoyed location markers.

Most of the line has now been cleared.

Anyone with information that could aid the inquiry, or about any other protected site thought to have suffered in any way, can contact Alison James, Maritime Archaeologist at HE's Designation Department, on 01332 881663 or 07770 736095, or at alison.james@HistoricEngland.org.uk

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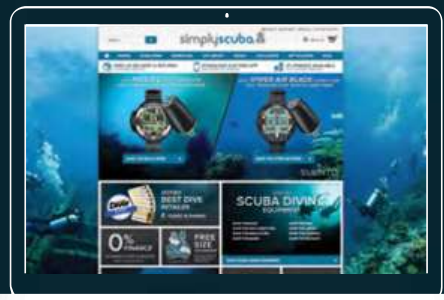
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Rubbish army marks 10 years of sea-cleaning

PEMBROKESHIRE'S NEPTUNE'S ARMY of Rubbish Cleaners (NARC) has notched up a decade of dedicated underwater cleansing of Pembrokeshire's attractive coast.

Fishing detritus has proved a constant bugbear over the years. The group says it has removed from the sea some 10,000 fishing weights equating to about a tonne of lead, along with "at least" 6500 hooks and "endless" amounts of fishing line.

"Sadly, cutting free wildlife has become a common occurrence for the divers, often discovering entangled wildlife in fishing-line or snared on hooks," Meg Pugh, NARC's publicity officer, told **DIVER**.

Fisheries have been helped along the way. "Just last week, with help from local fishermen, the group recovered an incredible 40 ghost-fishing shellfish pots from Milford Haven's Dale Peninsula," said Pugh.

"In the past five years, 87 lost shellfish pots have been recovered, helping to reduce the potential for ghost-fishing. Twenty-one of these were removed from Skomer Marine Nature Reserve in 2014, from which 19 lobsters, 29 brown crabs, 26 spider crabs and three fish were released."



Cutting a lobster free.

The group has lost count of the ubiquitous shopping trolleys, bikes, tyres, cans and plastics hauled out during the hundreds of dives that it has made, but memorable and rarer finds have included satellite dishes

and even a Mitsubishi van.

Dave Kennard, NARC's founder and chairman, said: "What started out as a mission to tackle marine litter that is often out of sight, out of mind has grown into an established group with regular clean-ups, hard-working volunteers and strong partnerships with local schools, the community, fishermen and our funders.

"We are not trying to just protect our marine environment by collecting litter but also to educate everyone to consider the conservation of our beautiful coastline." ■



The inevitable shopping trolley.



Mark Jones with an abandoned van.



Disentangling a fish.

Lifeguards save divers

TWO DRIFTING DIVERS were recovered off Fort Lauderdale, Florida by the quick thinking of beach lifeguards after an empty boat drifted ashore from a nearby reef.

Examining the boat, they saw diving equipment aboard, indicating that the craft "wasn't abandoned" and much more likely to have become separated from its owners.

Noting the position of the reef mooring buoy and prevailing wind and current, one lifeguard trained his binoculars on the area where he thought the divers might be – and saw two heads in the water, about three-quarters of a mile out to sea.

A rescue boat was dispatched and the relieved father and son were picked up after about 45 minutes' drifting, during which time wind and sea state had got steadily worse.

They had tied their boat to the reef buoy, they said, but its line had snapped in the roughening sea. ■

Can you help?

THE NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY Society's North East section is seeking information from wreck-divers for its project Heroism & Heartbreak: True Tales from the Hartlepool at War 1914-18.

This aims to tell the stories of sailors and families connected with the many vessels sunk in the conflict that originated from the two Hartlepool ports.

NAS North East wants to hear from divers who have information about, or pictures of, vessels they know to have been Hartlepool-built and lost in WW1.

Contact Gary Green, Regional Co-ordinator, at gary.nasnorth-east@virginmedia.com or on 07752 215633.

WW1 Hartlepool shipping losses can be seen at www.hhtandn.org/hartlepool-at-war/wwi ■

SUSPECTED SUIT-VALVE FAULT RESULTS IN RAPID ASCENT

A DIVER SUFFERED a rapid ascent and had to be airlifted from the Isles of Scilly to Plymouth for recompression treatment after a suspected suit-valve failure sent him hurtling upwards.

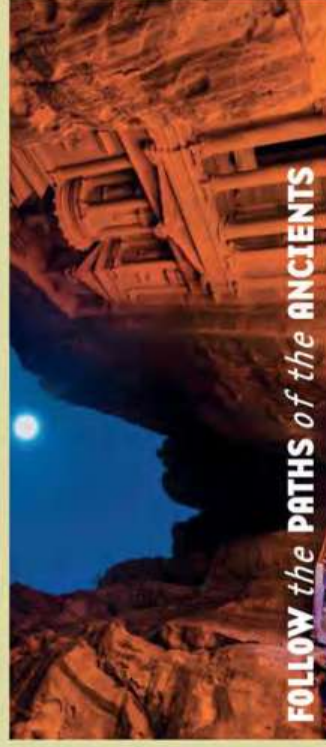
According to local press the man, aged 65, was on a club dive near Wingletang Ledge when the incident occurred, and he rose from a depth of 38m.

The skipper of the charter-boat

from which the group had been diving told press that the diver's drysuit looked "like a balloon" when he appeared at the surface, indicating an equipment failure that had allowed an uncontrolled

amount of air to enter the garment.

The diver was reported to have been unconscious when he surfaced but was expected to make a full recovery after treatment. ■



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TRAINING OPTIONS IN MUSTIQUE

August wasn't the best of months for the dear old British Sub-Aqua Club.

First there was the diver-extradited-to-Malta incident that you read about in last month's *DIVER* but which also sparked off an almighty Internet kerfuffle that was deafening with the sound of high-horses being mounted, boats being burned and colours nailed to masts.

At times it became so impassioned that things escalated to the rarefied level of a fracas, with the adequacy of BSAC's insurance at the heart of things and threats to leave or not join being thrown around like discarded chip-wrappers on a Saturday night.

And then there was the really big one. The Duchess of Cambridge qualified as a diver, reportedly so that she could join hubby William when he does deep dives to see sharks. On the one hand this is great, because sooner or later she could well become Queen, and

having a scuba-diving Queen has to be a good thing, especially one brave enough to go shark-diving without a cage.

But then Prince William is President of BSAC, a position previously held by his dad, Prince Charles, and his grandad, the Duke of Edinburgh – despite which, Duchess Kate decided to train with PADI.

To be fair, there probably wasn't much option on Mustique, but why she couldn't have sorted out her life a bit better and spent three months enjoying the sight of wayward verruca plasters and lost earrings on the bottom of the local council pool, then done her open-water dives in some benighted quarry to get ready for the exotic foreign holiday like the rest of us did, I really can't imagine.

As for BSAC, it said it was "thrilled" with the diving duchess, and didn't mention the PADI thing at all, so that's all fine.

practice bombs on an uninhabited rocky island off the north-west coast of Scotland that is both unsinkable and looks a bit like an aircraft-carrier.

Inevitably some of them miss the island and end up in the water, and some of them don't go off.

Stephen Kenrick, from Widnes, is part of the team that gets the job of finding them and making them go bang. He says it's because they're too dangerous to disarm and lift.

Yeah, right. Getting paid to dive and blow stuff up? Where do I join?

Coke in the hole

Drug-smugglers will do anything to get their product across borders, even things like dragging 25kg of cocaine through a flooded tunnel while using a rebreather to prevent the formation of tell-tale bubbles.

Evelio Padilla-Zepeda was caught red-handed at the US end of a tunnel that started out in Mexico and ended in a canal, and from the state of his kit and unit he hadn't had the best of days before he was arrested.

I bet the maker of his rebreather won't be using his testimonial in its advertising.

River gets lucky

River the cat didn't have a great month either. He was aboard a boat when it sank.

It isn't clear why he was on the boat in the first place, cats not being water-lovers. The boat was a low-slung power-jobbie and the owners were not cat-people, but his hydrophobia is probably stratospheric now, because he spent an hour under water before being rescued, still alive.

That seemed like a long time to me, but then I remembered that cats have nine lives, which makes it six minutes forty seconds submerged per life, and that sounds much more survivable.

the sharks to get back to the boat.

So far, so banal. All I have to say is that if they're really on oxygen the sharks are going to be the least of their problems.

Let's just hope that the final movie turns out to be better than the pre-production nonsense, even if history is against them.

Weird blob

Divers off Turkey's Mediterranean coast reported seeing an eerie, unidentifiable blob the size of an elephant at a depth of 22m.

Fortunately the divers included a photographer and a videographer, so they were able to get some decent images and upload them to the Net.

They were quickly told that they'd seen a squid-egg mass, probably laid by a red flying squid, *Ommastrephes bartramii*.

The female lays her 2mm-long rectangular eggs in a gelatinous mass that gets larger as it interacts with sea water.

Shine a light and it looks a bit like a huge snow-globe, with the eggs glittering in the torch-beam. There will

be tens of thousands of eggs in there.

Red flying squid are voracious predators, but it seems anything and everything likes squid eggs for breakfast, so it's only by laying such huge numbers that a couple will survive to become adult and keep the population stable.

Ain't the sea an amazing place?

Makes you smile

Welsh people are great. They're always optimistic, determined to look on the bright side regardless of the evidence, and they're generally a pleasure to be around.

And the evidence suggests that Welsh journalists are no different. *Wales Online* recently ran a piece entitled "9 Things to Do Today to Get You Out of the House and Put a Smile on Your Face", one of them being to try scuba-diving off Newport.

Give us that job!

After highlighting so many underwater jobs you wouldn't want to do, here's one you would.


Both the RAF and the Navy drop

Going with flow

Divers get to see a lot of ships, afloat and on the seabed, and they all share a common heritage, lying on the surface of the water like a pillow afloat on the boundless oceans of your bed the morning after the night before.

Anyway, it doesn't have to be like that. Jacques Rougerie's *Separabit* concept is a vertical ship intended as an oceanographic research platform that will mostly drift with the currents, harvesting the energy it needs from wind, waves and sunlight.

The design, which vaguely resembles a diving shark, has more ship under water than there is above it, and the necessary funding is pretty much there to actually build it.

Yay! A pre-sunk wreck! Bring it on! 

Sharks or the gas?

More details are emerging of the plot of thriller movie *47 Metres Down*, which is about to start shooting.

The film follows two sisters who go cage-diving to see great white sharks, but then – *dah, dah, daah!* – the cage breaks loose and drops to the bottom of the sea, 47m below, and the girls have just an hour's oxygen left before they have to risk

Sea People





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PRIDE OF MAN



She arrived in rain and left with a cold, but the days spent diving the Isle of Man in-between were pure gold for **SUE DALY**



Above: Lion's mane jellyfish.

Pictured: Diving the Burroo.

AS MY PLANE APPROACHED Ronaldsway airport, the heavy grey clouds cleared to allow shafts of late-afternoon sunshine to dapple the view below in bright patches of light.

We flew in over the sea, and as the coast of the Isle of Man came into sight I was able to take advantage of my aerial view to do what all divers do as we come into land at a dive destination – check out the vis.

It looked promising. Half an hour later, as I left the airport, the heavens opened, a sudden change in the weather that I was to learn is characteristic of this island in the middle of the Irish Sea.

I was diving with Discover Diving, based in Port St Mary at the southern end of the island. It operates the 12m hardboat *Endeavour* and, with more than 30 years' experience of diving around the Isle of Man, is expert at finding a sheltered spot for a good dive in all but the most extreme weather. It also serves homemade cakes and endless hot

drinks, has a dive-lift and the most civilised loo I've ever seen on a boat!

Our week began with a couple of shallow dives on the east coast, just south of Port St Mary.

Garden Rock is a pinnacle close to the cliffs rising from a sandy seabed at 18m, and the Ledges is an area of rocky gullies, overhangs and small walls.

With visibility of around 10m and plenty of lobsters, crabs, soft corals and other colourful marine life to see, it was a gentle introduction to what would become a week of spectacular diving.

Both sites lie within one of three areas around the coast that are completely closed to fishing. Five further regions allow only restricted fishing activities, or are protected for their eelgrass meadows, horse-mussel beds or other important underwater habitats.

As a diver I'm always attracted to places in which marine conservation is taken seriously, and the Isle of Man is certainly one of them. The main fishery effort is in dredging for scallops, both





the larger king scallops and the smaller queenies.

Last year I dived there with a group of marine biologists and we were permitted to dive a scallop bed in the Port Erin Closed Area that was established in 1989.

It has been recognised worldwide for its success, and when you dive there it's easy to see why. As well as several king scallops per square metre (and I never knew scallops could grow so large!) the area was alive with all sorts of other marine life – a superb example of what the seabed can look like when it's left undisturbed.

THE NEXT DAY the brisk easterly had grown stronger, so we did what you can always do on an island, and dived on the other side. Steve and the crew braved the rough seas off Port St Mary to bring the boat and our kit around to Port Erin, where we stepped on board and headed off to explore the sheltered waters of the west coast.

The wreck of the *Citrine* lies at the base of Bradda Head, just north of Port Erin. The steamer was on route from Belfast to North Wales in ballast in March 1931 when she struck rocks in thick fog. Two of her crew survived by climbing the steep cliff to safety, but the other 10 perished.

Today the remains of the 50m ship lie

Above: Endeavour dive-boat.

Right: Grey seals can't resist a fin, though blue is not their favourite colour!

Below: Wreck of the *Citrine*.

Far right, clockwise from top left: Sunstar; anglerfish; velvet swimming crabs; octopus; queen scallop; male cuckoo wrasse; crystal nudibranch (*Janolus cristatus*); scorpionfish; *Facelina annulicornis* nudibranch.



scattered on the seabed close to the cliff at 14m. The boiler and engine are recognisable among the broken wreckage, and on the collapsed bow section to the south you can just make out winches, chain, an anchor and a spare propeller.

The most obvious marine life here is a bold group of ballan wrasse that hover around the divers in the hope of a free meal, but when I visited the wreck it was an anglerfish that stole the show.

The afternoon dive was another treat for those of us who love spotting critters. At Fine Bay Pinnacle we were promised

a wealth of small, colourful subjects, so the photographers among us switched to our macro lenses, and we were not disappointed.

Comparing notes afterwards, we calculated that between us we had seen at least 10 species of nudibranchs, not to mention other beautiful mini-beasts such as squat lobsters, spiny scorpionfish and Devonshire cup corals.

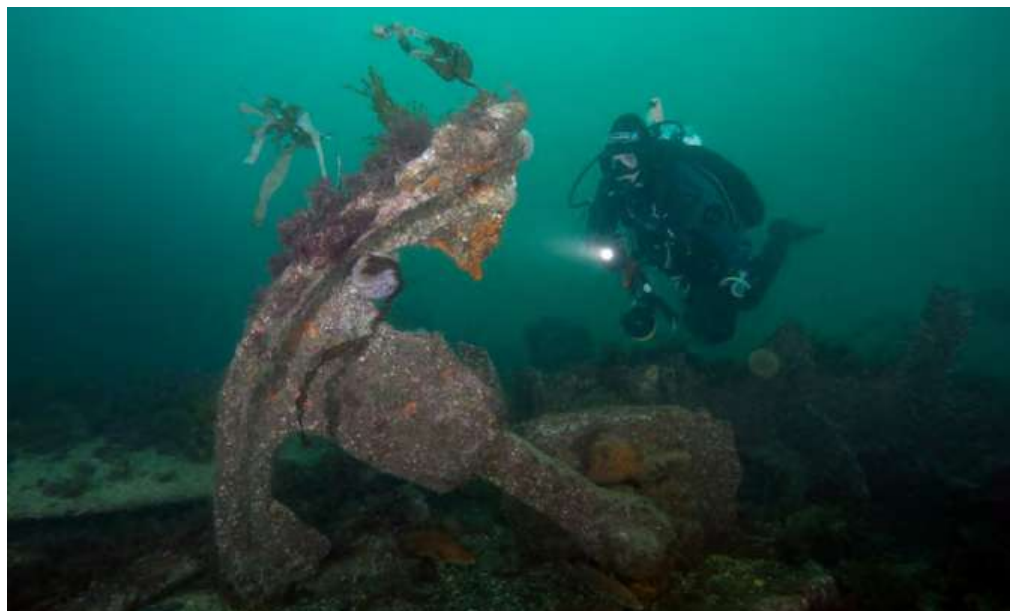
The pinnacle itself rises from the seabed at 20m to within a few feet of the surface, and a "normal" diver could easily swim around it in a few minutes.

For an underwater photographer in macro mode, however, its mass of cracks, crevices and overhangs can take hours to explore.

SO FAR ON THE TRIP we had only glimpsed the grey seals for which the diving around the Isle of Man is so well known. All that was to change with a dive at Gibdale Bay on the west side of the Calf of Man, the small island at the southern tip of the main island.

The plan was to do a gentle drift along the bouldery slope, admiring the mass of white and yellow soft corals, purple and pink urchins and vividly coloured cuckoo wrasse. The seals had other ideas.

Within minutes of our being under water, dappled silvery torpedoes of blubber with puppy-dog eyes and a bushy fringe of whiskers were swooping by, barrel-rolling effortlessly into view before





disappearing with a flick of a flipper.

Ignoring them was impossible – not that you'd want to, because every now and then you'd feel a tug on your leg and find yourself looking down into a huge pair of eyes, while a less innocent-looking set of teeth gripped your fin.

My buddy and I abandoned the drift dive and tucked ourselves up in the shallows of a small bay to enjoy the show.

Being in the water with seals makes you feel incredibly clumsy as they swirl around chasing each other at incredible speed, and watching them with other divers is huge fun, because they love to sneak up from behind, then tug on anything that attracts their eye.

Usually it's a fin but sometimes it's an arm or, more alarmingly, a hose or piece of camera gear. Fortunately they are fairly gentle.

Yellow fins appear to be a favourite, as does unbalancing a diver completely, causing you to end upside-down in a tangle of kelp and SMB line. I swear you can almost hear them laughing!

BY THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK the wind had decreased, allowing us to experience some of the less-sheltered sites.

The first of these was the Burroo, a spectacular rocky outcrop on the very southern tip of the Calf of Man, shaped like a huge dragon with its head lowered as if drinking.

Exposed to the full force of the





weather and tides, this is a site that can be dived only on a calm day and at slack water, but it's one for which it's definitely worth waiting.

The vis was at least 15m as we dropped down to an underwater landscape every bit as rugged as that above. The kelp soon gave way to a series of sheer walls, huge boulders and intriguing gullies.

At 20m the rocks were covered in a fluffy carpet of oaten-pipe hydroids that was being grazed by an army of nudibranchs. A little deeper and these were replaced by a colourful patchwork of anemones – huge, plump plumose anemones in bright white and orange, and jewel and elegant anemones in vivid shades of pink, orange and purple.

Lobsters and crabs peered out from beneath the boulders, and shoals of ballan wrasse and pollack darted above. If you ever need a site to show someone sceptical about British diving just how stunningly beautiful our home waters can be, then this is the place.

AS WE ROUNDED THE REEF and started heading back towards the shallows, we were treated again to a full-on display of seal clowning and grace.

Back on the boat my fins were removed and a mug of tea placed in one hand and a bacon roll in the other. Life really doesn't get any better than this!

The Burroo was so spectacular that we dived it again next day, but that afternoon it was time for some more metal.

The 6563-ton *Clan McMaster* was on her way down the Irish Sea from Glasgow to Liverpool in September 1923 with a general cargo including coal, cotton and sewing-machines when she struck rocks in thick fog in the swirling waters between the Calf and the main island.

The crew of 80 reached the shore safely, but the ship became a total loss.

The shipping company salvaged some of the cargo, but it is said that many a local household became the proud owner of a new sewing machine.

Today, more than 90 years of weather and tide have taken their toll on the ship, which lies completely broken on the shallow, rocky seabed of Calf Sound. The remains of the huge engine and boilers wear a crown of kelp and, like the



propshaft, are home to great swathes of plumose anemones. Seals are common there, and flit among the old metal ruins.

The tides are ferocious, so our dive was timed to coincide with slack water. In practice that meant sheltering in the wreckage for the first half of the dive, then watching the tide roar the other way for the second half. It did mean, however, that when we surfaced we were taken to the west, and away from the treacherous rocks in the Sound.

ON OUR LAST DAY the wind had dropped completely, the sun beamed down from a cloudless blue sky and the sea was flat-calm. To make the most of such conditions, it was decided to dive Chicken Rock, a stack with a lighthouse on top of it about half a mile south of the Calf, and apparently even more spectacular than the Burroo.

I had been battling for most of the week with a cold. It was getting worse, so I



Above, clockwise from left: Grey seal; diver at Garden Rock; on the *Clan McMaster* wreck.


Below: The Burroo or Drinking Dragon.

did the sensible thing and missed out.

It was a decision that may have saved my eardrums, but that evening I had to listen to my fellow-divers raving about the amazing gullies busting with colour, stunning vis and walls plastered in life.

To help me get the picture they showed me their photographs, and I could see that they weren't exaggerating.

To make matters worse, they dived the Sugarloaf Caves in the afternoon: shallow, sunlight crevices famous for their colourful marine life and diving guillemots.

There's only one thing for it – I'll just have to go back to the Isle of Man! 



DISCOVER DIVING's boat *Endeavour* can take 12 divers. A full charter for six days costs £500 a day (two dives), but individuals can book on at £50 a day. Tanks, weights, air and nitrox are supplied and rebreather and technical divers catered for. DD also has a self-catering flat for up to 14 at £20 a night, www.discoverdiving.im

FERRIES: The Isle of Man Steam Packet Company runs a conventional ferry from Heysham that takes 210min and a fast (165min) ferry from Liverpool. A return for two adults with car costs from £268, www.steam-packet.com

AIRLINES: EasyJet (London Gatwick, Liverpool and Bristol from £50 return); Citywings (Belfast, Blackpool, Gloucester, Newcastle, Jersey and Glasgow from £50 return); Flybe (Liverpool, London Stansted, Manchester and Birmingham from £30 each way); and Aer Lingus (Dublin from £70 return).

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Nice and easy does it – **NIGEL WADE** chills out in a Caribbean location tailor-made for the more relaxed diver

THE PRECIPITOUS WESTERN walls of the Piton mountains vanished beneath the surface of the warm Caribbean ocean. Their crests rose majestically towards a blue sky dotted with puffy white clouds as we explored below the waves in the shadow of their peaks.

We discovered a seabed adorned with huge volcanic boulders long since laid to rest after their birth in fiery cauldrons of molten lava, and a brief but violent journey down steep slopes before crashing spectacularly through the interface between air and water. Their once-polished hard granite was now softened with multi-coloured sponges, coral and algal growth.

Small, bright purple patches stuck neatly onto some of the rock faces gave away the presence of eggs laid, and now robustly protected, by valiant parent sergeant-major damselfish. These would bravely confront anything that dared to come close, regardless of size or species.

Dense schools of silver-flanked chromis weaved their way above and through the maze of valleys, tunnels and overhangs as we tried in vain to follow them on their daily quest for life-giving plankton washed up from the depths.

The current was moderate as the tide picked up, carrying us along effortlessly and allowing us to drift gently between slackwater eddies offered by the big rock clusters. The exposure to the current and the shooting of scenes for the movie *Superman II* gives this dive-site the unimaginative but apt name of Superman's Flight.

Bright violet vase sponges came in and out of view as we flew past; they glowed with an almost iridescent sheen as the dappled sunlight from the surface struck their sides.

The reef was also littered with big sponge formations in bright orange, red and yellow hues, along with dark red gorgonian fans, creating a kaleidoscopic colour pallet to assault our senses. The orange sponges seemed to glow and their form made it appear that red-hot lava was still oozing from beneath the Earth's crust.

It was the first time I had dived these clear blue waters since a family holiday back in 2004. Images burnt into my mind reappeared as if from the day before, and the sight of Petit Piton towering above as we surfaced made me feel as if I had time-warped, the underwater excursions of today and yesteryear blending into one.

I had joined a group of British and

OF THE PITONS

American divers on a Scuba Place trip visiting the island of St Lucia in the eastern Caribbean Sea, on the boundary with the Atlantic Ocean.

St Lucia is one of the Windward Islands that form the Lesser Antilles, situated just north-west of Barbados and north of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

It is green, lush and mountainous, its highest peak at around 950m being the inland Mt Gimie, but it's the two sharp-tipped mountains on the west coast that have become St Lucia's iconic landmarks. Gross Piton and Petit Piton rise to 771m and 743m above sea level respectively and are linked at their base by the Piton Mitan Ridge.

In 1660 the French, the first European settlers, named the main towns, ridges, mountains and many bays and called the island Sainte-Lucie after the patron saint of Syracuse, martyred in 310AD.

Like most of the Windward Islands, sovereignty was fiercely contested between the British and French colonialists. St Lucia changed hands no fewer than 14 times until in 1814 the British took definitive control.

As with neighbouring islands, pirate ships took advantage of the preoccupied nations fighting each other and slipped unseen into hidden bays and inlets, using them as a safe berth to hide or trade their ill-gotten treasures.

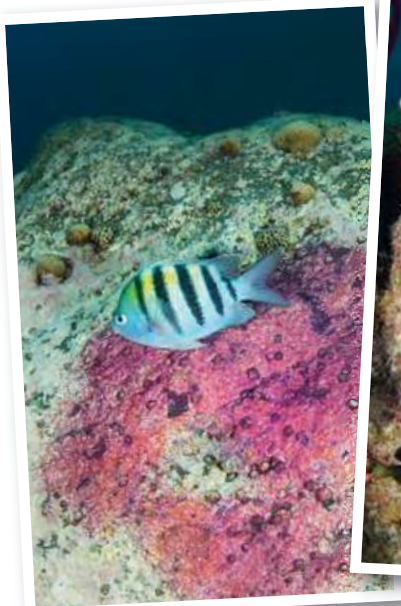
In 1979 St Lucia became an independent Commonwealth state, retaining its associations with the UK.

Dawn Shewan is Operations Manager at Dive Saint Lucia, a recently opened PADI 5* Instructor

Left: Diving in the shadow of the Pitons.

Right: Dawn with a small curly tentacle anemone, Pedersons shrimp and arrow crabs.

Below, from left: The purple patches are eggs laid and protected by sergeant-major damselfish; a gang of cannibalistic damselfish ravage an egg nest while the parent is distracted.



Development Centre located in the marina at Rodney Bay in the north-west of the island.

A mad-keen diver, she jumped at the chance to buddy with me for a week of exploration of west-coast dive-sites.

Our second dive of the day was at Coral Gardens. There must be hundreds of sites of

that name around the world, some living up to their designation, others in need of reporting to trading standards.

This one delivered the goods. Stretching the length of Gross Piton, it is the island's longest reef. Its underwater topography is typical of the boulder-strewn foundations of the mountains.

A small forest of sea plumes lying between rock outcrops and sponge-covered bommies caught my eye. It seemed the perfect place to hunt the elusive critters and juvenile fish for which this area is renowned.

Dawn and I made our way under the tall waving fronds, joined by the ever-present schools of chromis along with creole wrasse and bold two-tone damsels.

A pair of small barrel sponges gave



refuge to a curly tentacle anemone. Tiny transparent Pederson's cleaner shrimps with bright blue-and-white-spotted livery wiggled majestically among the poisonous appendages advertising their commensal trade to passing fish.

They shared their home with two large yellow-striped arrow crabs, their rangy legs making them look more like big garden spiders than the crustaceans they are as they sat sifting particles with their tiny claws.

Dozens more purple egg patches could be seen dotted around the rocks. This looked to be a key nursery for the sergeant-majors, but it was a hunting

ground too. We looked on in horror as one doting parent became preoccupied fending off a single damselfish, only to have its unhatched young quickly ravaged by the rest of the marauding gang.

Was this an organised raiding party, or just a chance encounter? We pondered the question as the cannibalistic carnage ended suddenly, and the shocked parent fish woefully inspected the damage.

Like Superman's Flight, this reef seemed to be in excellent health, with large swathes of soft and hard corals along with big intact gorgonian fans decorating the real estate between the prolific clusters of sponge. I wasn't surprised to hear that



Top left: Dive Saint Lucia's boat.

Above: Volcanic boulders litter the seabed, now covered in rich marine growth.

Left: The aft deck of the *Lesleen M*, its hanging gorgonians rich with life.

Right: Even in the photo the seahorse is hard to see.

this is one of the sites most visited by divers in St Lucia. What did astonish me was that unlike other popular reefs it didn't appear to have suffered from the increased diver activity.

OUR NEXT DAY'S DIVING started on the oddly named wreck of the *Lesleen M*. The ship's owner Pappy Mac had apparently selected a letter from each of the names of his grandchildren to arrive at "Lesleen", and the single "M" from the family surname, McQuilkin.

The remains of this 50m freighter lie upright on a sandy seabed at a maximum depth of 20m, the deck elevated to just 10m. It was sunk in 1986 as part of an artificial reef project by the fisheries department, so was prepared for divers by removing doors and hatches, giving unrestricted access to most of the interior.

The whole of the freighter was clearly visible as we descended beside the permanent mooring line attached to the





foredeck's windlass. We headed for the seabed to take in the view of the silhouetted bow as it rose boldly towards the surface.

The metal surfaces are no longer painted and bright but dull and covered in rich marine growth. Seafan branches reaching out from the steel hull obscure the vessel's original sharp lines, making it appear soft and yielding.

The cargo hold, large and empty, allowed us unrestricted access to the stern and the covered superstructure of the engine-room. An open rusting steel stairway led to the aft deck, wheelhouse and crew cabins.

The larboard gangway was clear enough to swim along, our exhaled bubbles creating air-pockets under the covered way. These transformed into shivering silver mirrors that reflected the scenes below as we passed through.

The aft deck held an abundance of growth. Big fan corals grew upside-down,



hanging stiffly from the underside of the ceiling resembling stalactites, spreading their fronds like fishing-nets to catch tiny morsels funnelled through the confines of the ship.

Red-flanked big-eye squirrelfish loitered around pillars in groups, adding to the profusion of colour, crabs and moray eels, and the ubiquitous lionfish that have thrived on the Caribbean reefs occupied little nooks and crannies around the deck, waiting for the cover of darkness and the opportunity to go hunting.

It was noticeable that the *Lesleen M* had changed since my first visit 11 years ago; it is metamorphosing into a prolific man-made reef, worthy of a visit by divers seeking an easy, relaxed and possibly extended wreck dive.

Next on the list was a critter-hunt around the Anse Chastenet reef, with *Hippocampus* on the list of animals occasionally found here. Dawn and I spent our dive time searching out the



Left: Dawn ascending the shot from the *Lesleen M's* foredeck windlass.

Above: A section of reef at Coral Gardens.

little branching sponges that sometimes host these beautiful creatures – the seahorse family doesn't swim well and can become fatally exhausted in even mild currents, so it made sense to concentrate on the slackwater areas.

It took fewer than 30 minutes for Dawn to find one, her sharp eyesight and local knowledge paying dividends.

Triumphantly thrusting her fist in the air to celebrate her find, she pointed to what at first appeared to be a scruffy-looking stub of sponge. On closer inspection I could see a handsome longsnout seahorse calmly confident that its incredible camouflage would keep it invisible and safe from predators.

ALTHOUGH 32 SPECIES of seahorse have been identified worldwide, only three of these, the dwarf, lined and longsnout variety, can be found in the warm Caribbean waters.

This one was dark brown and blended perfectly in colour and texture with the small piece of sponge around which it had wrapped its tail. Unfortunately, as is often the case with these hard-to-find creatures, it had secreted itself in a position that made it almost impossible to capture with my camera.

We instead gave it space, marvelling at its beautiful form before setting off to find other species.

During the rest of our dive we enjoyed seeing small blennies as well as needlefish, crabs and scorpionfish, but there were also an alarming number of lionfish.

These fish are worryingly fat – their new-found habitat obviously suits these skilled and voracious hunters of the reefs.


Further dives at sites north of the Pitons yielded an array of differing underwater terrain, from wall dives at

Anse La Raye to the Key Hole Pinnacles, where an encounter with a large crab, tangled in discarded monofilament, led to a search for a knife to cut the poor animal free.

Knives are banned for visiting divers, but a member of the dive-crew had one and the crab was quickly released from its life-threatening predicament.

The species list grew as large reef squid put in an appearance, ghosting in and out of view as they changed colour and skin texture, Turtles were spotted along with rays and grouper, and we enjoyed some cherished encounters with the bold two-tone damselfish that are abundant around the reefs.

The diving in this wonderful Caribbean destination is a relaxed affair. The currents are insignificant, the water warm and clear.

St Lucia proved to be as spectacular under water as it is on land, and that's saying something when you feast your eyes on the majesty of those verdant twin peaks rising from azure waters. 



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Nigel flew direct to St Lucia with Virgin Atlantic from London Gatwick. www.virgin-atlantic.com

DIVING ▶ Dive Saint Lucia offers a full complement of diver training and daily guided two-tank boat-dives including on-board lunch and beverages, www.divesaintlucia.com

ACCOMMODATION ▶ Nigel stayed at the 4* Coco Palm Resort & Spa, located in Rodney Bay Village on an all-inclusive board basis. www.coco-resorts.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ St Lucia is rarely affected by hurricanes, but does see heavy rainfall in June through to November. The reefs can generally be dived year-round.

MONEY ▶ Eastern Caribbean or US dollars.

HEALTH ▶ Take a high-factor sunscreen at all times and mosquito repellent during the rainy season. The nearest recompression facilities are in St Lucia's capital Castries.

PRICES ▶ The Scuba Place offers seven-night trips including flights, transfers, all-inclusive hotel accommodation and a 10-dive package from £1499pp, based on two sharing a room at either the Coco Palm Hotel or the Harmony Marina Suites, www.thescubaplace.co.uk

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ saintluciauk.org





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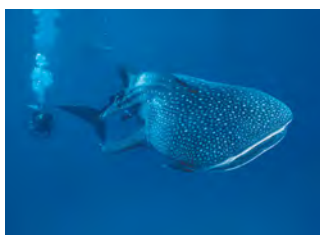
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GET THE MOST OUT OF DRIIFT DIVING



Go with the flow is the obvious advice, but **SIMON PRIDMORE** says that a little more knowledge can work wonders for confidence

THIS ISN'T DIVING, it's flying!" were the first words out of her mouth as she removed her regulator, eyes still wide and heart still pumping after an adrenaline-fuelled ride along a kilometre or more of Bali's north-eastern coastline.

She had been carried along across a seabed teeming with life by the waters of the Indonesian Throughflow flooding the Lombok Strait on their way from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean.

This is drift-diving, letting the prevailing ocean current take command of the direction and speed of your dive.

The prospect of diving when a current is running is often a major source of diver anxiety. This concern is understandable, as a current puts the ocean firmly in charge, and many of us feel ill at ease when we are not in control of what is happening to us.

However, with the right skills and a

little experience, dives when a current is running can be some of the best of your life.

WHERE AND WHY?

The places where you will typically encounter current while scuba-diving include reef walls parallel to the shore, exposed and submerged seamounts in channels between islands, and passages through fringing reefs.

Quite apart from the excitement, the main reason you want to dive in places like this when there is a strong current is the fish! As water movement through channels and reef passages increases, everything comes in from the blue.

Huge schools start to congregate, clinging together close to reef walls and mid-ocean pinnacles for shelter. Then predators come in to feed on them. Seascapes that are quiet and relatively lifeless at times of calm water can turn

into phenomenal action-filled aquatic circuses when the current picks up.

CURRENT SIGNS

From the surface, the tell-tale signs of a strong current are whirlpools interspersed with suspicious patches of calm. A wavy line of calmer-than-usual water running parallel to the coast is a good indication that there is a current running along the shore.

Under water in the tropics, you know that a site is current-swept if there are plenty of gorgonian fans and sea whips there. The more water that moves past these corals and brings them nourishment, the larger they grow.

If you see them permanently bent like trees in a high wind, you know that currents there are often very strong.

Below: From the surface, the tell-tale signs of a strong current are whirlpools interspersed with suspicious patches of calm.

GOING WITH THE FLOW

On a drift-dive, the best advice is to go with the flow, resist the instinctive urge to use your fins for anything more than balance, tuck your arms in and enjoy the ride.

The ability to anticipate, quick reactions and good control of your buoyancy and positioning in the water are useful qualities if you want to stay on course and avoid damaging either yourself or the reef.

A good drift-diver needs to be something of a slalom skier and know how to adjust speed and turn smoothly.

Make yourself as streamlined as possible and secure and tuck in all hoses and accessories, because you will be moving fast close to an uneven surface and you don't want anything to get caught up as you pass.

Wear a full-length wetsuit with neoprene on your arms and legs to



GARRY BEVAN



Above: Big fish huddling together, sheltering from the flow.

protect yourself from harm if you do brush against anything.

FOLLOW THE EXPERTS

To get the best idea of how the current is running, look at the fish. After all, they are the experts.

When there is no current, the fish, large and small, will be milling around all over the place.

In a mild current they will all be facing the same way, into the current, and the stronger the current becomes the closer to the reef they will go.

As the current increases in strength the little fish will be spread out flat and close to the coral, waving their tails like crazy to stay in position.

When it gets really strong they will be down in and among the coral structures, and even the big fish will be hovering very close to the reef.

If you want to take a break from the current during a drift-dive, use these big

fish as your guide. You will find them behind large rocks or outcrops where they can shelter from the flow.

If you are a photographer, this is your opportunity to get up close, as they will be reluctant to move out of their hiding-place.

STAYING STILL

When you have found a hotspot on the reef or wall where there is lots of action, you will want to stick around and not allow the current to carry you away immediately. So you need to find a way of staying in place.

Finning like crazy against the current will tire you out quickly. Instead, you can grab hold of a solid bit of rock; first making sure that it really is a rock or, if you have one, you can deploy your reef anchor, also known as a current hook.

A reef anchor normally consists of one or two lengths of cord passed through the eye of a blunt-ended curved

piece of stainless steel that looks like a large fishing-hook. A clip is attached to the other end of each cord.

The idea is that you wedge the hook into a crevice in a reef, snap the clip(s) on to your BC's D-ring(s) and let go so that you can just hang in the current, held in place by the anchor, effortlessly enjoying the view.

Don't be discouraged if you find it difficult at first to find your balance. It may take a little practice over a few dives for you to become comfortable with the technique.

GOING AGAINST THE FLOW

Nobody enjoys swimming against a current. It saps your energy, increases your breathing rate, generates stress and is an experience best avoided.

However, sometimes you find yourself having to do it, at least in short bursts, as marine topography is not all straight lines and smooth curves. The reef line is made up of outcroppings, ridges and canyons that can deflect and reroute the current in unexpected directions.

There are techniques to make swimming against a current a little easier when it has to be done. Along a wall, stay close to the rock and use the contours to shelter you from the main thrust of the current wherever possible.

On a rocky seabed, you can use a cave-diving technique called "pull and glide", reaching forward from stone to stone and using a single fin-kick to power each move.

Over sand, you can use a similar technique and walk with your fingers to help you sustain momentum and stop yourself going backwards.



Below: Reef anchor in use.

DEALING WITH DOWNDRAUGHTS AND UPWELLINGS

Just the mention of a downcurrent is enough to inspire fear in many divers, as they visualise themselves getting caught by an irresistible force that drags them into the abyss with no opportunity for escape.

The natural response when confronted with a situation like this where you feel out of control is to panic, but there is no need.

Normally, downdraughts or downcurrents are localised phenomena that occur along reef walls: think of them as waterfalls in the sea.

When you encounter one, the first thing to do is get out of the flow by moving closer in to the wall so that its contours offer you shelter.

Once out of the stream, relax, exhale, take a few deep full breaths, check your air supply, depth and decompression status, look around you and plan.

Look to see where the big fish are hiding, or if there is a place where the sea-whips are not waving around.

It is not a good idea to fight a downcurrent. It is a struggle you cannot

win. The oft-quoted tactic of inflating your BC to counteract its efforts to carry you down is potentially dangerous, because the current might suddenly release you from its hold and you will find yourself on a runaway ascent to the surface – which will do you much more harm than the current could do.

Unless you have spotted a place further along the wall that seems calm, usually the best advice is to swim laterally out away from the reef towards the blue.

If you find yourself being carried a little deeper initially, stay calm and keep swimming. Before long, you will emerge from the pull of the downcurrent and can return to a calmer section of the wall or begin your ascent.


Think of upwellings as reverse downcurrents. The same advice applies. First move into the wall out of the flow, relax, think, observe and act calmly.

DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY

Because drift-dives can carry divers over long distances, loss at sea is a real risk, and it is essential that you choose the right operation with which to dive and

GARRY BEVAN



are equipped to make it as easy as possible for the boat crew to find you at the end of your dive. 

Left: Reef anchor aka a current hook – the term reef hook is used less these days.

• Next month Simon Pridmore looks at Surface Safety and discusses what gear, techniques and strategies you should deploy to make sure your drift-dives always end well.

Read more from Simon Pridmore in *Scuba Confidential – An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver* and *Scuba Professional – Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations*, both available on Amazon in a variety of formats

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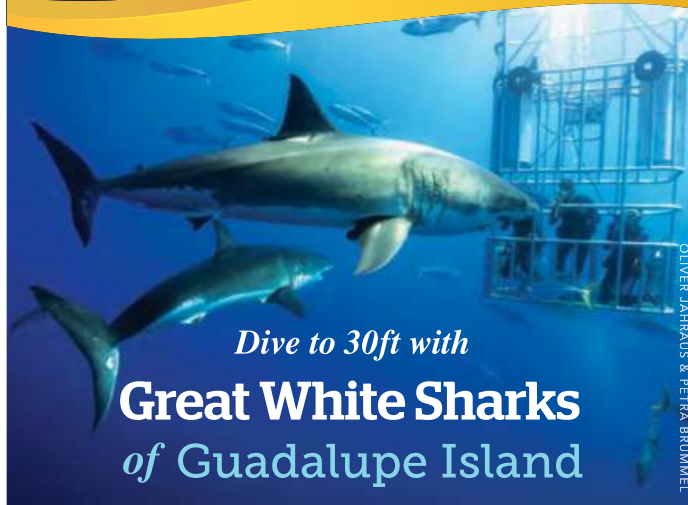
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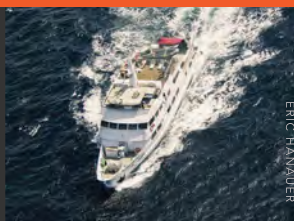
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25 AND IN ITS PRIME

I F YOU'RE A DIVER, if you want to be a diver or if you just want the diver or divers in your life to have a great day out, the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham is the place to be in the last weekend of October.

It's the 25th NEC Dive Show, a big occasion indeed, and event organiser **DIVER** Group is pulling out all the stops to make this annual event a special one. So put the weekend of 24/25 October in your smartphone calendar or, better still, book your tickets now, because a) it's closer than you think and b) advance booking means substantial savings on admission.

Also, there is a pair of tickets worth £8000 waiting for some lucky Show visitors for a liveaboard trip to no less a dream destination than Socorro in the East Pacific – see the last page of this planner for the mouth-watering details.

Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre will be awash with divers for the Show of the Year, and you and your friends and family need to be there with them.



LAUNCHPAD FOR TRAVEL

If you have a holiday diving destination or perhaps several in mind but need more hard information before making your decision, DIVE 2015 is the place to be. The people you'll meet have first-hand diving experience from all over the world, so they know what they're talking about.

Some of them you may have dived with before; others you may be diving with before the year is out.

The **ASIA-PACIFIC SHOWCASE** is where you'll find representatives of some of the exciting destinations in the Far East. Meet divers from well-known locations such as Indonesia and Thailand or

lesser-known places such as Brunei. Places like the Philippines and PNG have their own spaces. You may be surprised to find that a foray east will cost you less than you thought.

Similarly, time spent chatting in the **CARIBBEAN VILLAGE** points up the diving distinctions between the many islands from Barbados to the Dominican Republic, Grenada to Tobago – and may point the way to a great holiday.

But travel for divers who live inland includes coastal Britain too, and the exhibitors in the **BRITISH ISLES EXPERIENCE** area of the hall include dive

centres and charter-boat operators dedicated to giving you the best homewaters experience they can offer.

Aside from these three concentrations of exhibitors, there are plenty of others dotted around the hall, representing everywhere from coldwater polar destinations to Red Sea and Mediterranean hot-spots.



DIVE 2015, the diving event of the year, takes place over the weekend of 24/25 October at Birmingham's NEC

25 YEARS AGO

So what happened at the inaugural Birmingham Dive Show in 1991, the first national diving exhibition to be held in the Midlands? What was drawing the crowds in those far-off diving days, when little was known of technical diving, nitrox was just a rumour and Monty Halls was but a slip of a lad?

As **DIVER** reported: "People were pouring into Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre at an overwhelming rate – and the aisles were already packed. Even NEC officials were amazed.

"They said they had seen nothing like it this year, shows of almost every other kind having been far less well-attended."

So heavy was demand on the Sunday morning that the Show had to be closed to

new visitors for 45 minutes!

A bigger hall would have solved the problem, but many potential exhibitors had doubted that the demand was there and had failed to book stands. They didn't make that mistake again – as a British diving exhibition it broke all records, and cleaned out the stocks of many exhibitors.

Apart from the shopping spree there were diver-training lectures, film shows,

a deep-diving JIM suit on display and RIB trials outside on Pendigo Lake.

But everyone wanted to see Martha Holmes and Mike deGrady, stars of the BBC's *Sea Trek* TV series. They didn't just give presentations but, using helmets with comms, answered visitors' questions while submerged in a glass-sided tank!

The following year the Show was bigger and better, and has never looked back.

DIVE 2015 tickets cost £13.50 on the door – but only £9.50 in advance. Book now at www.diveshows.co.uk



WELCOME TO THE STAGE...

THE DIVER STAGE

Note the times (though be aware that they can sometimes change) and be sure not to miss your favourite speakers, who will be giving 40-minute presentations this year – in heavy rotation, because there is a lot of talent to pack in!

10.10-10.50

Mark Powell

TRAINING DOESN'T WORK

All agencies and instructors insist that they produce safe divers, so why do we see so many with poor skills and little or no understanding of basic diving concepts? asks Mark. He argues that such dangerous mismatches start with instructor-training that fails to cover the essentials – and that instructors teach the wrong thing in the wrong way.

Whether you're an instructor looking to improve your teaching skills or a diver wanting to know how to spot a suitable instructor, don't miss this one.



11.00-11.40

Alex Mustard

THISTLEGORM'S REAL CARGO

The man who straightened us out about the contents of our favourite Red Sea wreck is back with a new twist on *Thistlegorm's* cargo, and it requires your input. Alex has images he needs help with, but also wants to see any interesting photos or footage of vehicles and artefacts from the wreck that you may have been unable to identify.

"It's a chance to pool all our knowledge and observations of the wreck in one place," he says. Email alex@amustard.com and mention which day you will be at the Show.



11.50-12.30

Andy Torbet

FEAR, RISK & DIVING

Andy's time as a paratrooper, diver and bomb-disposal officer in the Army allowed him to hone his risk assessment and stress management techniques. Risks included blowing up, and things could get a little stressful. Applying these skills to cave- and deep-diving projects, he argues that fear is good – and risk may



not be what we think. Andy looks at how to make a seemingly insane project safe, and how he deals with fear and anxiety.

12.40-1.20

Louise Trewavas

ALL-TIME TOP 10 DIVING MISTAKES

For years divers have followed Louise Trewavas's underwater adventures in the pages of *DIVER*. She has vast experience and is a keen observer of diver behaviour, so who better to draw up a hit-list of diving cock-ups and draw conclusions about how, when things do go wrong, we can still survive?



1.30-2.10 (Sat only)

John Bantin

SHARK-FEEDING: RIGHT OR WRONG?

John has been busy writing his latest book *Shark Bytes*, and one chapter, extracted in this month's issue, deals with the vexed question of shark-feeding – guaranteed to divide, annoy, delight and confuse divers in equal measure. He expands on the theme at DIVE 2015, based on his first-hand experience of sharks – but will you agree with him?



1.30-2.10 (Sun only)

Claire Gwinnett & Laura Walton-Williams

SILENT WITNESSES

The two underwater crime-scene investigators from Staffordshire University's Forensic & Crime Science department are experts in aspects such as documentation and interpretation of evidence and body recovery, and plan to use real dive-related case studies to take us on a forensic-analysis journey. Claire and Laura proved a big hit at DIVE 2014 – as did their silent companion!



2.20-3.00

Monty Halls

THE GREAT SHARK RACE

Dive Show stalwart Monty had a great unfulfilled ambition – to track and scientifically analyse sharks in the annual



Sardine Run off South Africa. And now he is back from leading, along with top underwater cameraman Doug Allen, an expedition of scientists and adventurers to do exactly that.

They chased the action using a land-based team of 4x4s and Monty's special Humber RIB to get in among the fish. What's more, his diver-ised Land-Rover and RIB combo will be with him at the NEC.

3.10-3.50

Paul Rose

DIVING THE WILD PLACES

Paul has been on a mission, to dive the Earth's remotest and most exciting dive-sites as Expedition Leader for the *National Geographic* Pristine Seas programme, and help in the process to publicise the plight of the oceans.

Recent expeditions have taken in Seychelles atolls, wild diving in Mozambique, the nearest French Polynesia gets to Antarctica and, at the other end of the Earth, Franz Josef Land near the North Pole.

So Paul has many a diving tale to tell – not that he has ever threatened to run short of those!



4.00-4.40

Helen Hadley

DON'T BE 'THAT GUY' ON THE BOAT

Nobody wants to be "that guy", the one who gets talked about by fellow-divers for all the wrong reasons – but with some sound advice it isn't too difficult a pitfall to avoid.

Based on varied experiences working and diving around the Orkney and Shetland Isles, Helen has many tales about UK liveaboard divers – and about being a female in what is still a very male world.



4.50-5.30 (Sat only)

Amanda Cotton

APEX PREDATORS

Apex predators such as sharks, crocodiles and Humboldt squid have a bad rap. This promotes an air of mystery and mysticism – and, of course, quite a bit of fascination.

Join Amanda as she dives into the wondrous world of these enchanting animals, sharing images and stories of her encounters; experiences that will leave you questioning the predominant reputations of these big, toothy, enigmatic creatures.



DIVE 2015 tickets cost £13.50 on the door – but only £9.50 in advance. Book now at www.diveshows.co.uk



THE PHOTO ZONE

The PhotoZone is where visitors can listen to, mingle with and question well-known diving photographers – one of the best ways of improving your skills. Admire the shortlisted images on display in the British Society of Underwater Photographers' annual Prints Competition and take part in the judging. Check out the latest camera set-ups, strobes and photo accessories and pick up tips as underwater photography experts share their knowledge on the Centre Stage...

25 Years
DIVE
2015

THE CENTRE STAGE

Image-based presentations: check latest times at diveshow.co.uk and on noticeboards in the hall.

Simon Brown

THE WORLD IS NOT FLAT: A 3D FUTURE

How many photos does it take to build a 3D model? Presenting recent wreck discoveries by the Weymouth-based Shipwreck Project plus other 3D examples, this will be an introduction to a new way of recording, documenting and interpreting what we see under water.



Alex Tyrrell

THE FLUO EFFECT

Find out how fluorescence occurs in the marine environment, what equipment is needed to view this natural phenomenon and get some tips on how to capture the effect on camera. Alex has had plenty of experience from his base in Koh Tao in Thailand.



Mario Vitalini

CHOICE OF WEAPON

"Sadly, there's no magic formula to winning competitions," says Mario, but he plans to outline how and why he chose the images that secured him the title of Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year 2015 – and also looks at the images he loved but did not enter.



Saeed Rashid & Nigel Wade

DIGITAL CLINIC

The Clinic is back, a chance for Show visitors to take part in a Q&A session with two of diving's leading photographers.

Both men are camera wizards, but if post-production skills are the issue, Saeed is your man, and if it's aspects such as balanced lighting for wide-angle, macro and super-macro, or dived fish portraits, Nigel's on the case!



Stuart Philpott

DIVING PHOTO-JOURNALISM

Taking the skills as read, the secret of successful photo-journalism lies in reading the minds of editors, and putting in front of them what they didn't know until that moment they really wanted! And if that doesn't work, Stuart has plenty more advice to offer.



Jane Morgan & Gill McDonald

FAR & NEAR, ALL LIFE IS HERE

Reprising the "my dive-site is better than yours" format that hit the spot at LIDS, Jane and Gill debate the relative merits of exotic dive destinations v colourful life-filled UK waters in a true battle of the photographs! Jane will share some beautiful photos of homegrown wildlife to counter Gill's fantastic critters from faraway places.



Bryan Stanislas

MAKING UNDERWATER FILMS

Underwater cameraman Bryan discusses how technology has developed to help leisure divers and instructors capture fantastic underwater footage. He covers everything from GoPros and compacts to broadcast camera systems and examines the main underwater filming methods.



Alex Mustard & Martin Edge

SETTINGS IN THE SEA

The two doyens of underwater photography are planning to share the essential camera settings for classic and creative photography.

They will explain how the right settings will give your images the look you're after and extract the best image quality from your camera, finishing with examples of how bending and breaking the rules can produce some really innovative images. We have a feeling this talk



will be particularly packed, so get there in good time!

Nick & Caroline Robertson-Brown

BEST WILDLIFE DIVE SITES OF THE WORLD

The professional photographers talk about the highs and lows of trying to capture the images they needed for a yet-to-be-published book.

Which destinations and which species would be best to pursue, and how should they set up their shots to get the best possible images?



OCEAN THEATRES

Not only are the **DIVER** and Centre Stages bursting with star divers, but the rolling programme of presentations in the two Ocean Theatres ensure that there is always something interesting to watch when it's time to take the weight off your feet.

Check the timetable on the day to make sure you don't miss anything you'd have liked to catch.

Take **DHARSHANA JAYAWARDENA** – a leading wreck-diver in Sri Lanka, he is talking about some of the 200 shipwrecks reckoned to surround his homeland. These include significant warships, the most famous being HMS *Hermes*, the world's first purpose-built aircraft-carrier, sunk in 1942.

Other presenters lined up include **BRYONY BARTON-CARROLL** (Emperor Divers), **SHARON BERNSTEIN** (Grenada Tourism Authority), **MATT CLEMENTS** (PADI EMEA), **DAVID JONES** (Triton Diving, "Budget Galapagos"), **LITO MENDOZA** (Philippines Department of Tourism), **CHARLOTTE MARSHALL-REYNOLDS** (Arctic Direct), **KENNETH MARTIN** (The Underwater Centre), **ALYSON NASH** (blue o two), **CHANTELLE NEWMAN** (The Diver Medic, "Resuscitation: Major Changes"), **SUE NOAKES** (Dive Worldwide), **SAEED RASHID** (Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority), **MARK PARRY** (Marine Aquarium Community Seagrass Initiative), **RALPH PANNELL** (Aqua-Firma Worldwide), **ALEX TYRRELL** ("Verde Island Passage", Philippines).



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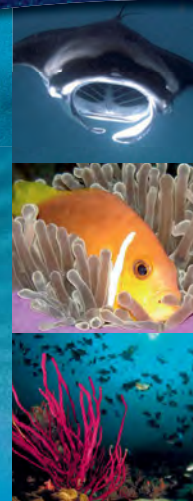
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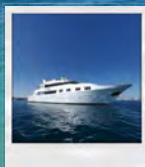
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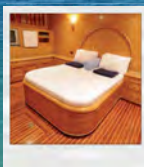


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Liveaboard of the Year 2014, 2013, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2007 and Tour Operator of the Year 2011: DIVER Awards | Best Tour Operator 2014 & 2013 and Best Liveaboard 2013: Sport Diver Awards

EXPLAINING & ENTERTAINING



THE PEOPLE TASKED WITH KEEPING US all on a learning trajectory – no diver can ever know everything is what we've learnt so far – can be found in the dedicated training-agency areas.

The **PADI VILLAGE** is the biggest of these, combining educational and travel options of all sorts and for all levels of experience.

The **BRITISH SUB-AQUA CLUB** should be well-supported as it is holding its annual conference at the NEC to coincide with DIVE 2015, and members from various regions will be manning their **BRANCH PODS**, hoping to welcome new recruits.



Another UK club organisation, the **SAA**, will also be attending, while the **SSI ZONE** provides further training options.

There are plenty of dive schools represented at the Show, offering everything from entry-level training and specialities to advanced technical instruction. There are interesting specialists too.

For example, the **UNDERWATER CENTRE** offers a route into making your leisure pursuit your career – as a commercial diver.

A new one-week Recreational Diver Medic course is launched at the Show by **THE DIVER MEDIC**, while **H2O FILMS**, the UK's "premier training organisation for underwater film-making by amateurs and professionals", introduces its H2O Film Academy Internships.

The pools are open

You may fancy trying out some of the latest kit in the **TECHNICAL POOL** run by **MR DIVING**, especially if it's one of the new generation of closed-circuit rebreathers that interests you.

You don't have to be a CCR diver to get wet, of course – for beginners, the younger generation in particular, the **TRY-DIVE POOL** awaits, with **STONE COVE DIVE SCHOOL** divers ready to enthuse them in a safe, secure and inspirational environment.

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DIVE 2015 Booth CV8!



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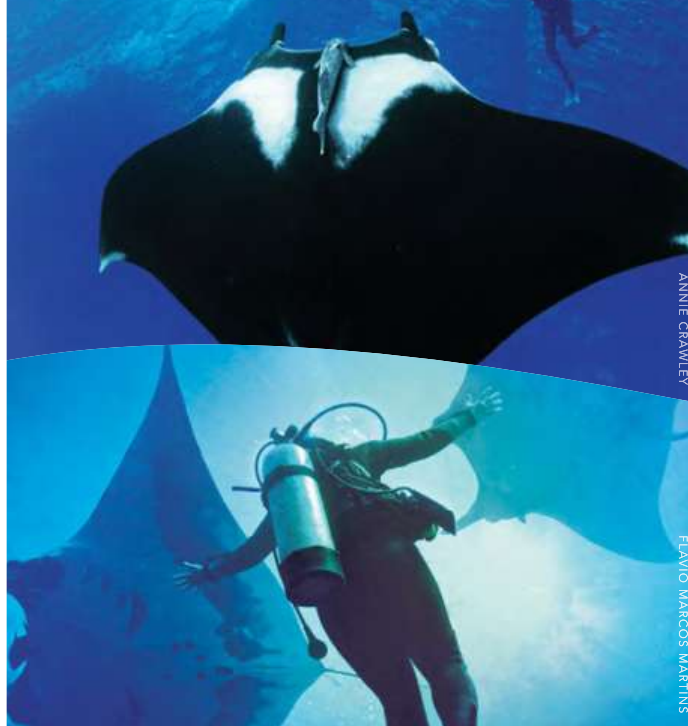
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NEW TOYS ARE US!

MANY SHOW VISITORS find the **NEW PRODUCT SHOWCASE** a good place to start exploring the Show, especially if they have purchases in mind or just want to check out the state of the art, from cameras and dive-lights to masks and fins.

If you see anything particularly interesting, there will be a retailer, distributor or manufacturer standing by in the hall and happy to demonstrate the product and answer your questions.

By way of a taster, look out for these products:

* **ANCHOR DIVE LIGHTS** has additional light-heads for its new modular canister light, a new entry-level video light for GoPros, a video spotting light with auto turn-off option when a strobe is detected, a modular Goodman handle and other accessories.



* **AP DIVING**, which makes Inspiration rebreathers and Commando BCs, now sells products direct to divers online and at dive shows and says the benefits include significant discounts, better advice and better after-sales service.

* **AQUAMARINE**

brings a limited-edition solid silver necklace highlighting the plight of whales created by diver and jeweller Rose Ledbury along with many other designs and marine wildlife sculptor Nicolas Pain exhibits his latest bronzes.



* **CUSTOM DIVERS** has a wing and harness system suitable for use with both open and closed circuit configurations and a full selection of accessories.

* **DIVESANGHA**, the dive-garment maker brings its new collection for 2016 and offers up to 50% discounts on items in its Basic collection, up to 50% on some items. All purchases come with a complimentary 10-litre dry bag.



* **EXPOSURE LIGHTS** offers what it

says is the world's first motion-controlled dive light, the SUB M3 Mk2, using advanced LED and li-ion battery technology, while its XS100 Series includes white, red and blue colour outputs and various mounting options.



* **LIQUID SPORTS** is UK distributor for Ursuit drysuits, Sharkskin divewear and also Bigblue lights, all of which will be at the Show, but it is also taking the chance to launch in the UK RATIO dive computers, from 2.8in coloured-screen to full-

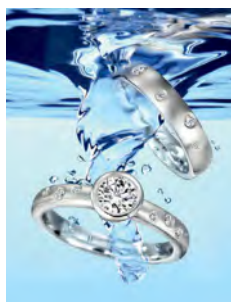


matrix watch-size units.

with new products including the latest versions of the women's Hera, the Atmos and the EX100 BCs. There are also new colours for its mask, snorkel and fin lines.

* **REEF JEWELRY**

More diver adornments come in the form of new platinum rings and its popular octopus necklace now in silver, along with necklaces, earrings, charms and cufflinks.



* **SCUBAPRO** brings its new watch-style wrist computer the Mantis M1 said to incorporate "your

25 Years
DIVE
2015

unique physiological factors into its calculations... completely personalised to you". It offers multiple topside functions like other "wearables" and for

diving can accommodate three gas mixes plus a fixed PPO2 CCR algorithm.



* **SCUBA STRAPP:**

DIVE 2015 sees the launch of the two-piece multi-task Scuba Strapp, the



flagship product in a range of straps and lanyards for divers.

* **SHEARWATER RESEARCH** from Canada is showing its latest trimix computers and rebreather control systems for technical divers. It has adapted the CAN Bus international digital messaging system for its DiveCAN technology, which helps manufacturers to integrate technological advancements as they become available.

* **SEA & SEA** The YS-D2 strobe is said to offer new and improved functions, including an illuminated rear control panel to allow Mode, Power and Exposure Compensation to be checked easily

even in dark conditions; larger control knobs; Ready/TTL audible confirmation; a more powerful modelling light with two power settings; red filters; a faster recycle time of 1.5sec and more.



Other exhibitors bringing their latest wares include **APEKS, AQUA-LUNG, BAUER, BEAVER, FOURTH ELEMENT, GREEN FORCE, HAMMOND, HUGYFOT, INTOVA, KENT TOOLING, LIGHT & MOTION, LUMB BROS, METALSUB, NORTHERN DIVER, O'THREE, OTTER, REVO, ROBIN HOOD, SUUNTO, TRIDRI, TUSA** and **WATERPROOF**.

DIVE 2015 tickets cost £13.50 on the door – but only £9.50 in advance. Book now at www.diveshows.co.uk



4th Element Diving

1240

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1420

Achilleon Diving Center

308

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222

Amphibian Productions / Santi UK

1346

Anchor Dive Lights

1044

Andark Diving & Watersports

1290

Apeks Marine Equipment

1050

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, The

110

Aqua-Firma Worldwide

910

Aqua-Fototeam GmbH

1161

Aquaholics

GB120

Aqua-Lung UK

1050

AquaMarine Diving - Bali

734

AquaMarine Silver

1072

Aqua Ventures

GB120

Arctic Direct

1272

Atlanta Designs

712

Atlantic Scuba

GB50

Azores Sub mergulhadores profissionais Lda

S11

Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.

CV10

Basking Shark Scotland

GB20

Bauer Kompressoren UK

930

Beaver Sports

1400

Big Blue

S5

Billy Shiel/Farne Islands Diving

GB100

Bite-Back Shark & Marine Conservation

922

blue o two

815

Blue Planet Aquarium

PV10

British Divers Marine Life Rescue

1172

British Society of Underwater Photographers (BSOUP)

P12

British Sub-Aqua Club

B100

Buddy Dive Bonaire & Galapagos (Bonaire Hospitality Group)

CV13

Bunaken Oasis Dive Resort

AP12

Cameras Underwater Ltd

P10

Caribbean Tourism Organisation

CV14

Central Compressor Consultants

342

CPS Partnership

620

Coral Cay Conservation

442

Cork Dive Centre

S2

Costa Brava Diving Centers Association

972

CREST Diving Centre

236

Custom Divers

102

Cyprus Tourism Organisation

416

D Vessey & Co Innerspace Systems Corporation

1106

DDRC Healthcare

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Deep Blue Diving Fuerteventura

1100

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982

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S3

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AP10

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B60

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1282

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Dive Into Ambon

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Dive Tech

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S10

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900

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951

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Diver Medic & Aquatic Safety

1371

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450

Diver's Ink Logbook Stamps

1141

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210

Divers Warehouse

510 & 59

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320

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Diving in Depth

GB20

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1270

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CV9

Dressel Divers

970

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GB10

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1342

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Egypt

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1046

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Mike Ball Dive Expeditions

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Monty Halls Great Escapes

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GB108

Nick Oneill Art

610

Norsemaid Charters

GB100

Northern Diver

1520

Ocean Leisure Cameras

P6

Ocean Quest

334

Ocean Visions Photography Academy

P5

Oceanaddicts

915

Oceanic (SW)

1510

OLA Diving Center

330

Oonasdivers

714

Orange Shark H2O (H2O Divers)

615

Original Diving

944

O'Three

960

Otter Watersports

724

PADI EMEA

PV2

Pharaoh Dive Club

300

Philippines Department of Tourism

830

Pico Sport Ida

1340

Poni Divers

AP2

Pro Dive Mexico Dive Centers

CV8

ProDivers Maldives

PV14

Professional Diving Academy

730

Project Aware Foundation

PV17

Red Sea Diving College

PV16

Reef Jewelry

1274

Regaldiver

710

rEvo Rebreathers

1410

Robin Hood Watersports

810

Royal National Lifeboat Institution

840

RSPB

1436

Safari Diving SL

1110

Salaya Beach Houses

226

Santi Diving

1140

Scuba Cat Diving

AP8

Scuba Hellas

924

Scuba Place, The

1160

Scuba Strapp

352

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1124 & 1126

Scuba Trust

914

ScubaClick (LivaboardsRus)

942

Scubapro UK

1320

Sea & Sea

1170

Sea Bees Diving

AP4

Sea Shepherd UK

1120

Sea World Scuba Diving Center

PV12

Seamoney Dive Centre Sdn Bhd

AP22

Shark Trust, The

1070 & 1071

ShawTek

952

Shearwater Research Inc

1276

Shipwreck Project, The

955

Sinai College

444

Skegness Aquarium

980

Skindeep Diving

GB80

South West Diving

GB50

Spain - Costa Calida & Region of Murcia

1040

Sport Diver Magazine

PV6 & 1382

Sportif Dive Holidays

920

SSI (Scuba Schools International)

UK S1

St Vincent & The Grenadines Tourist Office

CV28

Stingray Charters

GB50

Sub Aqua Association

1316

Sub-Tropic Adventures

100

Suunto Diving UK

1460

Swahili Divers & Kervan Saray Beach Lodge

345

Swanage Boat Charters

GB80

Tasik Divers Manado

AP16

The Dive School At Stoney Cove

TDP

Tobago Tourism Development

CV4

Tourism Malaysia

109

TriDri® - Fortescue Wilson

721

Turks & Caicos Islands Tourist Board

CV6

Two Fish Divers

AP6

Under Pressure

400

Underwater Centre, The

440

Underwater World Publications

310

UnderWaterVisions/ Nauticam UK

P14

Underwaterworld at Stoney Cove

1470

Utila Dive Centre

PV18

Vivian Dive Centre

GB20

Wakatobi Dive Resort

424

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DIVER

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DIVE
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Cabo San Lucas, one night all-inclusive hotel accommodation in the suite-only Dreams Cabo San Lucas Resort & Spa; nine nights on board either the spectacular *Nautilus Belle Amie* or *Explorer* on a full-board basis, and two further nights back in Cabo to get your land-legs back! All airport transfers are included.

Socorro is one of the hottest dive destinations on the market, so don't

miss this or any opportunity to dive it! All this could be yours and a buddy's – just buy a DIVE 2015 ticket! *Terms & conditions apply.*



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Exhibitor Preview

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Stand AP12

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TREWAVAS

WHALE OF A TIME

YES, YES, YES: LET'S GO! I fling myself backwards off the boat into the sea.

Under the surface, everything is suddenly slow. There's a hole in the sky that closes with a splash above my head. I suck on my regulator and get a mouthful of salty sea.

And then I remember that I'm on a snorkel.

But before I can even clear the tube and hold my GoPro straight, there are spots in front of my eyes. White spots, and a dark, cavernous mouth. The whale shark is practically on top of me.

YIKES!

I've just spent 90 minutes on a fast boat heading north from Cancun, Mexico, specifically to swim with whale sharks. So this encounter is no great surprise. But however mentally well-prepared, there's something slightly shocking, slightly awe-inspiring about a creature this flipping enormous. Particularly when it's heading straight at you, its mouth open.

YIKES! I exclaim. In truth it's probably more of an involuntary scream, a high-pitched comedy gurgle. Needless to say, this noise has zero impact on the direction of the approaching whale shark. I'm washed onto the top of its head like some clumsy, over-sized remora.

For the benefit of anyone who may not have swum with a whale shark, I should mention that this is definitely *not* how it's meant to be done.

The recommended technique is to avoid being noisy or splashy, and to swim alongside the whale shark, maintaining a respectful distance of several metres.

The rule here in Mexico is that only two people plus a guide get to swim with a whale shark on any one time, to avoid stressing it out.

However with 10 or so whale sharks circling about, and twice that number of boats, it's somewhat chaotic. The whale sharks must have seen it all a thousand times by now, and seem completely unbothered.

Judging by most of the people present, each "whale shark encounter" consists of a confused plunge and around 15 seconds of flapping about. Because for most, the effort of having to swim at pace is exhausting.

After glimpsing the shark, many retreat hastily to the safety of the boat for a beer and a "whale shark" selfie.

As for me, I'm in overdrive, finning like crazy. I'm clutching my GoPro in both hands, arms outstretched, as if my life depended on it.

The screen is completely filled with white spots on grey and ripples of reflected light dancing across the skin of the whale shark. This close-up, it's mesmerising – more dazzling than the light show at any rave. Adrenaline has gripped me. I could fin forever.

Right now this is useful. If I stop, I'll collide first with the top fin, and then receive a hefty swipe from the giant tail.

Still finning for England, I edge my way across, over the billowing gills, and far enough away to capture a complete shot of that distinctive blunt head.

I can't see boats or people, it's just me and the shark. This is HEAVEN!

Eventually the guide physically pulls me away to let somebody else have a go. My only words are: "Can I go again?"

I've barely climbed the boat ladder and I'm reaching for my fins again. The captain chuckles, he sees the signs. It's in my eyes – completely dotty.

LOUISE TREWAVAS

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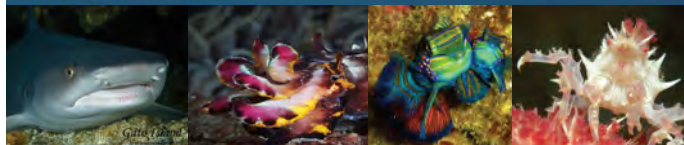
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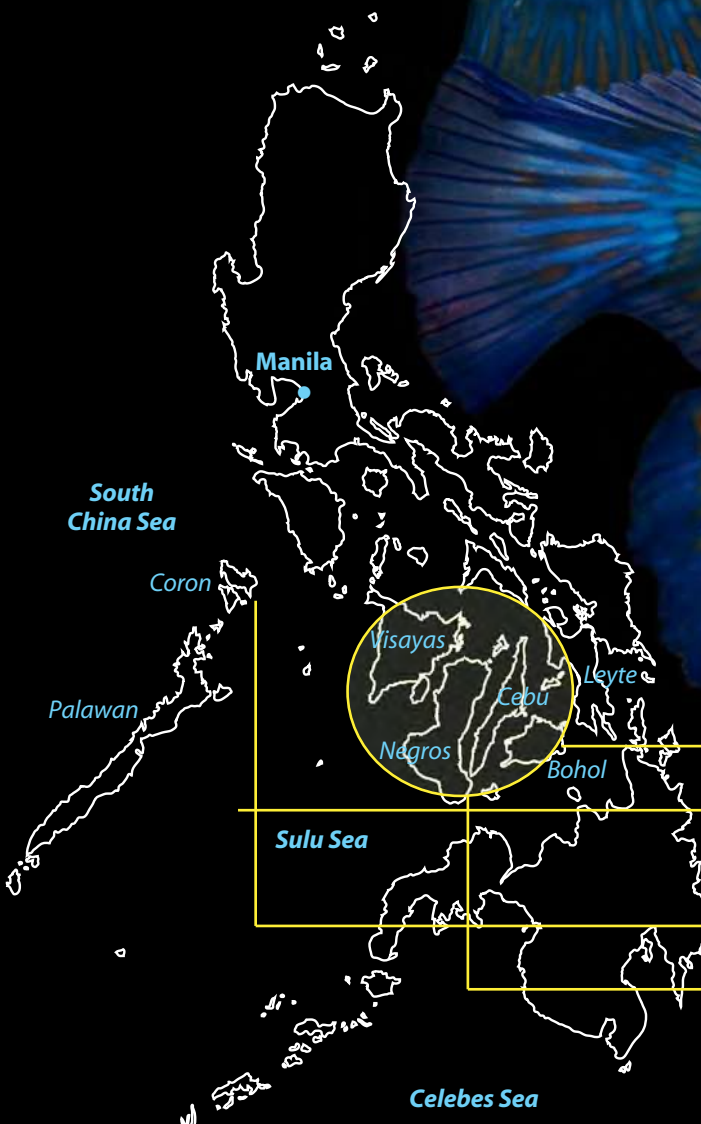


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Tiny things, big wow! (Bohol) 63

Transcendent Tubbataha 69

Booking Now Special 72

The Wrecks of Coron Bay 75

Road to the Visayas 81

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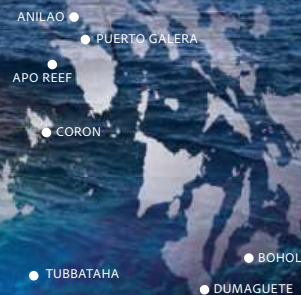
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TINY THINGS, BIG WOW!



JOHN LIDDIARD heads for the east coast of the island of Bohol to get his macro-diving eye in. When you get into critter-hunting mode, it can be hard to stop

IT'S GREAT TO WAKE UP in the morning, draw the curtains and think "wow!". It does wonders for the enthusiasm, getting the diving blood flowing and relieving the exhaustion of travel.

While the Blue Star Dive Resort's website quotes "68 steps to the beach", that hardly conveys just how sparkling is the view from our bungalow atop the cliff. Blue sky and sea meet within a frame of palm trees and green foliage.

The wow continues into my first dive, a shore-dive on the house reef. The profile is a typical swim out across the relatively flat back reef and slightly raised crest to the wall.

Visibility is still stirred up from a storm a couple of days before my arrival, so my wow is not about the wall or the corals or visibility, but about a seafan with a colony of pygmy seahorses. Pygmy seahorses on the house reef on the first dive. Wow!

Even better, I have the right lens on my camera. On most trips I would start with a wide-angle lens. Today I am forewarned of both vis and the resident critters and am prepared for macro.

Knowing that seahorses can become stressed by too much flash, I take my time to line up just a few good shots rather than popping away at the rate modern cameras and strobes allow.

Dive-guide Nelson is no slouch when it comes to finding cool stuff, and nearby picks out a hairy squat lobster hiding in the crevasse of a barrel sponge.

I find a few nudibranchs and shrimps for myself and fill the gaps in-between by spotting reef fish.

Pictured: Juvenile cuttlefish at Virgen East.

Right: A long way down – the "68 steps to the beach".





But having started with that, would the rest be an anticlimax?

An hour later the tide has turned and the current flows the other way along the wall. Tidal range is less than 1m, providing gentle currents along the Anda coast that fuel the reef while never requiring much thought or effort.

FOLLOWING THE HOUSE REEF to the east there are no more pygmy seahorses. Between countless nudibranchs I squint to see orangutan crabs among finger and bubble corals, and dragon shrimps looking like tiny warts on whip corals.

Sufficiently small, camouflaged and fuzzy, I have trouble picking many of these out with the naked eye, and often don't know what I'm looking at until I focus my macro lens on it.

My buddy uses the simpler solution of an underwater magnifying glass.

As on the first dive, after half an hour at depth we ascend to the lip of the wall to avoid further nitrogen intake, conserving the second half of our air while working our way back towards the

start. This general profile proves to be the pattern for the rest of the week.

As we cross the crest onto the reef flat, critter-spotting continues with a banded sea-snake. I have a love-hate relationship with sea-snakes built on frustration. They are beautiful to watch, but hardly



Above, left: Pygmy seahorse.

Above: Orangutan crab.

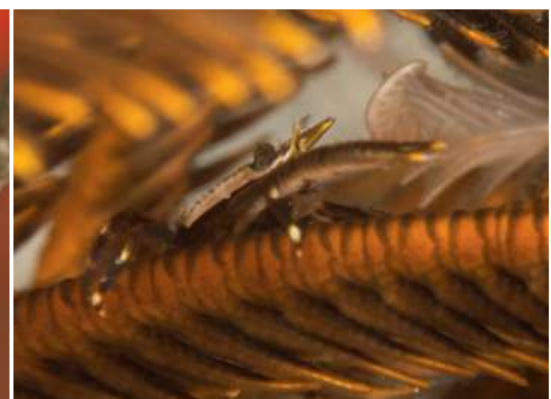
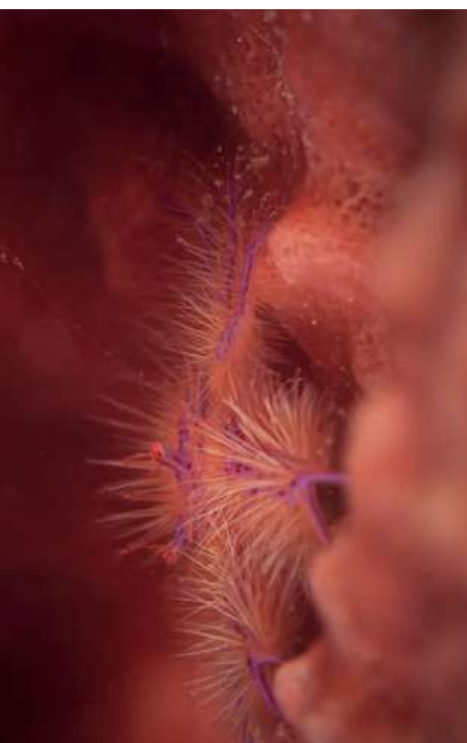
Above: The *bangka* returns to the small beach at the bottom of the steps.

ever stop moving long enough for me to get a good photograph, are long and thin so are awkward to fit in a frame, and are that unhelpful size between what works best with a macro lens and what works with a wide angle.

After a third dive the steps back up the cliff could be a daunting prospect with dive-kit, so it's a relief that the dive-crew ferry cylinders and weights up and down for you. They would carry my camera too, but I prefer to look after that myself.

Diving continues by boat, with the *bangka* returned from hiding from the storm of a few days ago. I had travelled to the island of Bohol via an international flight to Cebu followed by a ferry that

Below, from left: Hairy squat lobster; dragon shrimp; Elegant crinoid squat lobster.



had also suffered from side-effects of the storm. By the time of my ferry the sea had calmed, but there was a backlog of passengers from previous days on which the ferry had been suspended.

The dockside ferry terminal was even more hectic than public transport usually is in this part of the world.

The benefit was a day less travel time than the alternative route via Manila, which would have involved an overnight wait between flights.

Bangkas are the traditional Filipino boat with a hardwood hull stabilised by bamboo outriggers. A shallow draught enables them to cross the reef and come within paddling distance of the beach. Motive power is an ingenious recycling of a Toyota car engine.

Other dive centres in the area use various *bangkas*, speedboats and even an engineless dory being towed behind a small fisherman's *bangka*. We laugh at its passing most days while having lunch on the restaurant terrace.

FOR SHORE-DIVING I had stuck with the lighter 80cu ft cylinder that is standard in so many locations. Now on the boat I opt for a heavier 15-litre. In years gone by I used to hardly breathe, but now I'm a bit of an air hog.

I blame it on both carrying a camera and too much time on rebreathers.

OK, I am mixing my units, but that's diving for you, especially with aluminium cylinders. For those who require a bit more consistency, the volume of an 80cu ft cylinder is 11.1



litres, so pumped to the same pressure a 15-litre cylinder holds just over 35% more gas.

The diving round Anda, on Bohol's east coast, is a fringing reef and wall that runs along nine miles of that coast, with Blue Star being well located just west of the headland in the middle.

Sixteen dive-sites are marked on the map. In practice, many have variations to either side. Further east, some are far enough apart to leave unnamed possibilities between them.

The width of the back reef varies from close in at the house reef to a few hundred metres from shore further afield. The wall typically drops to 25m or 30m before breaking into a sandy slope, and is occasionally cut by sand channels.

If you look it up on Google Maps' satellite view, you can see the reef structure, back reef, crest and sand channels.

Fifteen minutes or more to the east by

Above: Manicure service from shrimps enjoyed while watching clown anemonefish.

Above right: Ornate ghost pipefish.

bangka, dive-sites are characterised by more frequent and wider sand channels breaking though the wall.

At Virgen we have the usual discussion about who is eligible to dive there, then conclude that the rule doesn't count, based on a technicality of the spelling.

The spelling is long-standing, the site being named after the village just back from the shoreline. Variations in phonetic translations are not unusual. *Bangka* is also spelt *banca* and *banka*, and simply means boat.

While the sand channels may not be as exciting for those who like to drift along the wall, on a macro critter-hunt they provide another habitat to search for the weird and wonderful. The first lonesome featherstar Nelson inspects yields an ornate ghost pipefish, then a few metres along the next featherstar is home to another ornate ghost pipefish.

A few scraps of broken seagrass turn out to be one less scrap of grass and a robust ghost pipefish.

Close examination of a fire urchin reveals a zebra crab, about the same size as a porcelain crab, but more angular and with stripes instead of spots.

CRINKLY PEBBLES RESOLVE into a pair of sea moths. Camouflaged beneath a solitary sprig of coral is a regular seahorse, one I can see the details of by naked eye without needing to look through a macro lens.

As with the pygmy seahorses, I limit the number of shots I take.

It's not actually muck-diving because

it's sand rather than muck, but the search techniques and results are similar. I would expect nothing less from a location dead centre in the Coral Triangle, and Bohol is an island renowned for good macro-diving.

As bottom time diminishes we make our way back to the wall and cruise along, slowly working shallower. Anemones and anemonefish are the obvious common factor between the sand, the wall, the reef crest and the flats that stretch away to the shore.

In addition to many varieties of anemonefish, including Nemo, in most anemones we also find shrimps among the tentacles and porcelain crabs under the corners – so many that I soon lose count, and bother to try to photograph only the best prospects.

But it begs the question; do all the anemones have families of shrimps and porcelain crabs, as they do families of anemonefish? Certainly we find shrimps or porcelain crabs on many

Below, from left: Banded sea-snake; spotted porcelain crab; gorgonian on the wall at Shark Point.





From top: Anna's *Chromodoris*; Chamberlain's *Nembrotha*; sky blue *Phyllidiella*; and Co's *Chromodoris* nudibranchs.

anemones, but on the anemones where we don't find them, is it because they are very well hidden, or is it because they are simply not there?

Between dives the *bangka* crew serve a selection of local fruit, the mangoes being exceptionally good and, Nelson tells me, Bohol has the best mangoes in the Philippines all year round.

It's a small world – it turns out that I know his auntie Liberty. She owns the hotel on Apo Island at which I stayed on a previous trip to the Philippines.

In a few days' time Nelson has a few days off to visit his family, so I ask him to say hello for me.

What else do local dive-guides do on their days off? Apart from catching up with his family, Nelson has plans to go diving. There is a voluntary project surveying near his home and he likes to volunteer with it. That is the kind of enthusiasm for diving that makes dive-guides who stand out from the crowd. It's not just a job – it's a passion.

Also to the east of Blue Star, DapDap begins with a wider sand channel opening further as it cuts through the wall. For critter-hunting this provides an expanse of sandy substrate at a good depth for a third dive of the day.

Ornate ghost pipefish are starting to become as common as the motortrike taxis that are the prevalent form of public transport, though without the compulsory biblical verse painted on the back. Nelson soon finds another one loitering in the fronds of a featherstar.

THAT WOULD MAKE nudibranchs the equivalent of jeepneys – generally bigger than ornate ghost pipefish and with a variety of bling attached to all corners. Though we do see some micro-jeepneys on the road and there are some nudibranchs that are absolutely tiny.

After a few days of macro diving my instincts are getting tuned in to the *Anda* environment. I check each featherstar I pass to see if I can find an ornate ghost pipefish for myself.

What is that blip on a limb? It's not until I have it in focus and filling my viewfinder that I see a crinoid squat lobster just sitting there – crinoid is the scientific name for the class of *echinoderms* that includes featherstars.

I feel quite chuffed, and also very lucky. These tiny and well-camouflaged critters normally hide beneath the claws of their host featherstars, and rarely come out in daylight.

HAVING EXTOLLED THE GREAT

critter-diving to be found on the sand, what about the wall? After all, there is nine miles of it.

Well, there are critters there too – just as many, I suspect, if not more.

With all the hiding-places a coral wall affords, some are simply harder to spot. That is, except where the critters are resident in anemones, like shrimps and porcelain crabs, or where nudibranchs munch their way along without a care in the world, as their bright colour schemes proclaim that they shouldn't be eaten.

With a consistently shallow crest, gentle currents and maximum depth of 30m, the whole length of the wall is ideal beginner-to-intermediate diving, with a good coverage of hard coral with sponges and soft corals hanging from it.

Some sections favour sponges, some favour fans and some favour whips.

The wall and reef-flat are also home to a variety of small reef-fish – various damsel and butterflyfish and cute little boxfish. Of bigger fish there are not so many. Outside Snapper Cave we catch a glimpse of the resident shoal in the distance, the visibility slowly improving as the effect of



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE >> Fly via Manila or Cebu.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION >> Blue Star Dive Resort, www.diveanda.com

WHEN TO GO >> Year-round.

MONEY >> Philippines peso.

HEALTH >> Cebu is malaria-free. Deco chamber in Cebu City.

PRICES >> Budget £1000 for flights via Manila including an overnight stay, or £885 for flights via Cebu, with about £15 for the ferry to Bohol. Room rates at Blue Star Dive Resort vary from about £50 to £80. Five days' diving costs around US \$350.

VISITOR INFORMATION >>

www.morefunphilippines.co.uk





Clockwise, from above:
Juvenile yellow boxfish;
tassled scorpionfish;
lizardfish; featherstars on
the wall at Shark Point.

recent rain is washed away.

The larger fish to be found on every dive are sedentary ambush predators. There are some monstrous crocodilefish, scorpion- and stonefish.

COMING TO THE END of a dive at Coco White, I am examining a particularly large and fat scorpionfish wedged above a green tree coral on the wall, almost missing a bigger and fatter frogfish a couple of metres further along. It's a frogfish with aspirations of becoming a black hole, judging by its size and colour. I wonder how many frogfish I miss simply because they are so well camouflaged?

Nine miles of wall is plenty for five days. If I were staying longer and conditions permitted, Blue Star runs day-trips on a larger *bangka* to offshore reefs and other islands with different reef structures and marine life, even as far as Leyte to snorkel with whale sharks, if you're lucky.

There are also reports of a couple of wartime wrecks within day-trip distance, sites to be explored when time permits.

Last day, last dives, where do we want to go? There are four of us on the boat and the vote is unanimous. We're all into critter-hunting, and while all sites have been good, one has been outstanding. Virgen East it is.



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TRANSCENDENTAL TUBBATAHA



Is this remote location one of the world's best for diving? **LISA COLLINS** thinks it may well be, but it's no destination for beginners



FEELING AN IMMENSE measure of excitement and a little trepidation, I started my journey to one of the most beautiful and exposed atolls in the world.

Some 150 miles equidistant from Borneo's east coast and the Philippines, in the middle of the Sulu Sea, lie the atolls that make up Tubbataha Reef Natural Park (TRNP). Designated part of the Philippines, this marine reserve consists of North and South Atolls and the adjacent Jessie Beazley Reef.

Part of the province of Cagayanon, this 10,000 hectares of coral reef lying at the heart of the Coral Triangle boasts more than 300 species of coral and 1000 species of animals, many of them considered endangered.

Up to the 1970s, during the summer months fishermen would make the long trip out to Tubbataha in fleets of traditional wooden *bangkas*. By the mid-'80s, modernised motorboats caused the reef to become over-exploited and, in response to diver and environmentalist pressure, Tubbataha was designated a UNESCO Natural Heritage Site in 1988.

A ranger station was built on stilts above a sand spit. Patrol boats are constantly on the look-out for illegal fishing-boats, and marine biologists stay there to study the coral and marine life.

Tubbataha's remoteness makes it

accessible only to divers by liveaboard. The easiest and most popular way to get there is via Manila to Puerto Princesa on Palawan Island, and it's then a 10-15-hour steam by liveaboard across open ocean.

Alternatively, and the option I chose, is to travel from Cebu. My trip had taken in the wonderful islands of Balicasag, Silquijor, Apo and Negros, and now it was to be followed by a 30-hour overnight powered sail.

A number of liveaboards venture out to Tubbataha, and I was lucky enough to be on the luxurious mv *Philippine Siren*.

BALMY CONDITIONS, reasonably flat seas, and a chance to catch up on sunbathing were enjoyed by all, after a fairly rigorous four or five dives a day. Excitement about our previous dives, and about Tubbataha, kept us all talking late into the evening.

None of us had been before, including Hans, the cruise director. But the dive-guides were full of stories of wonder: beautiful reefs, sharks galore, abundant fish and the most serene and spectacular scenery they had ever seen.

An hour after finally going to bed, we were tossed unceremoniously from our bunks by a sudden storm, which raged on for most of the night. Finally, after wedging myself into my bunk



Pictured: RIB on the deceptively calm waters of Tubbataha.

Above right: The ranger station.



sideways, I managed to lie flat long enough to get about two hours' sleep.

Next morning I woke to the flattest and most beautiful seas I had ever seen. Considering the location, in the middle of the open ocean, this was incredible!

The Tubbataha season runs from February to June and usually provides outstanding diving conditions, with clear skies, flat seas and excellent visibility – often above 30m.

Mooring at the North Atoll, our RIB took us to one of the many incredible dive-sites Tubbataha has to offer. Washing Machine, we learnt, could be prone to unpredictable currents, but was of such magnificent beauty that the guides had chosen it as the first dive.

We dropped onto the top of the wall surrounding the atoll and descended over the edge to around 25m.

A slight current was flowing and visibility was down to 20m after the storm, but beauty abounded in the most incredibly colourful and vibrant reef.

We were met by an entourage of grey reef sharks, which seemed to be swirling

around us for most of the dive. Two spotted eagle rays hung in the blue. A marble ray furrowed in the sand, with huge dogtooth tuna, giant trevally and milkfish stalking their prey.

Blacktip sharks were sleeping on the white sandy spits on top of the reef, while huge Napoleon wrasse and bumphead parrotfish, turtles and schooling fish made it seem like a barrel-load of steroids had been dumped onto it – everything seemed bigger and better than anywhere else!

As we surfaced from our dive, the only word on everyone's lips was – wow!

SHARK AIRPORT FOLLOWED, with, unusually for a dive named after sharks, lots of sharks! A huge school of jack swarmed above the reef, while a big squad of chevron barracuda circled endlessly in the blue.

Reef sharks swam nonchalantly, unbothered by our bubbles. A blue-spotted fantail ray rested on the sand, while octopuses and yellow-margin moray eels hid in crevices.

Above left: A school of yellow-tail barracuda.

Above: Hawksbill turtle.

Fan Alley was a beautiful wall-dive with large seafans in a variety of colours and schools of giant barracuda and jack. Again, the obligatory reef sharks escorted us around the reef. Here there was a strong current, and a thermocline at 18m that dropped the sea temperature 2°.

Amos Rock, near the ranger station, seemed the healthiest reef I have seen in my travels. Thousands of fish, huge schools, large Napoleons, hunting tuna, majestic angelfish, arrowhead soapfish and more than 20 juvenile grey reef sharks made for an incredible dive.

All this, topped off with a manta ray cruising along the edge of the wall!

A night dive at a previously unexplored site named by our group as Donato's Grotto, after our dive-guide, produced an abundance of life.

Hans spotted two saron shrimp that were five times larger than normal. He was so excited by his find that he couldn't stop talking about it all evening.

Early next morning we set off for the South Atoll to see how this would compare. We moored next to Delsan

Below left: Patrolling whitetip reef shark.

Below: Diver with a green turtle.





Wreck, which protrudes from the reef shallows but is too shallow to dive.

We entered the water just off its bow, on the edge of the wall, and descended to 24m. Pristine reefs surrounded us, with white sand cuts heading up over the edge of the wall that were a haven for nurse sharks, hawksbill and green turtles.

Here we experienced our first real changeable current. After diving in slight-to-moderate currents at the North Atoll, we were surprised by the sudden and varied changes in direction.

A thermocline at around 20m saw many of the divers shivering from a 3° temperature drop.

Later that afternoon we tried the dive again. There were no turtles but there were large schools of great barracuda, lots of reef sharks, many different moray eels, and oceanic triggerfish guarding their perfectly circular nests in the sand, aggressively chasing off surgeonfish and grouper.

A STRONG DOWNCURRENT on the wall had us fighting to stay within no-deco limits, and as soon as a slight let-up occurred we headed back to the top of the reef to complete an extended safety stop, while examining nooks and crannies for more morays and octopuses.

The next day we headed to Black Rock. As at previous dive-sites, there were lots of sand gullies in shallower water there.

Groups of oriental sweetlips at a cleaning station allowed divers to get extremely close for minutes at a time. Green turtles sleeping on the reef-top combined with a gentle current gave an impression of calmness and beauty.

Another unexplored site, which we named Sweetlips Express, followed that afternoon.

This pristine reef featured beautiful corals and many, many harlequin and oriental sweetlips. Lots of black snapper, a rare giant snapper, hunting jack and schools of juveniles reef sharks followed.

The current had been slight, but three-quarters of the way through the dive we were suddenly picked up by a screaming

current that catapulted us right around the atoll from one side to the other, passing under our liveaboard and spitting us out at almost exactly the opposite point from which we had started our dive!

We felt like the astronauts of Apollo 13 when they were catapulted around the moon as if from a slingshot!

Black Rock, early the next morning, was decided by consensus to be a nice easy dive to start our day.

How wrong were we! In complete contrast to the previous day's dive here, we encountered a crazily wild current as soon as we got onto the wall.

We flew along it for the first half of the dive, meeting both up-, down- and side-currents. Then it spat us out and we spent a lazy 10 minutes cruising the reef with virtually no current at all.

As suddenly as the current had stopped it restarted, again speeding us across the reef. We inflated an SMB and let the flow take us into the blue while we completed our safety stop.

Tubbataha is a paradox. It is both one of the most peaceful but also one of the most exciting places I have ever dived.

Its beauty is astounding, and, if ever there was a place that is transcendently spiritual, it is here.

Above: Sleeping nurse shark at Delsan Wreck.

Above right: Harlequin sweetlips.

Right: Pristine reef at Washing Machine.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Flights to Cebu via Singapore with Singapore Airlines, or direct to Manila with Philippine Airlines, with onward internal flights to Puerto Princesa with Philippine Airlines, Air Asia or Cebu Pacific.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Siren Fleet offers six- or 13-night trips from Puerto Princesa or Cebu, www.sirenfleet.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ Tubbataha can be dived only from February to June. Water temperatures range from between 26-29°. A full 3-5mm wetsuit is recommended year round, more for protections than warmth.

PRICES ▶ blue o two can arrange a six-night trip to Tubbataha from Puerto Princesa on *Philippine Siren* for £2099, including transfers, full board, diving (nitrox if required) and dive gear, www.blueotwo.com

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.morefunphilippines.co.uk





MAGIC ISLAND GETS MAGIC SISTER

It can now call itself Magic Resorts with an "s", because Arie & Desiree Pullens opened a second resort called Magic Oceans in Anda, Bohol in July.

For more than 10 years the Magic Island Dive Resort has been known as a family-style facility in Moalboal on Cebu, with ready access to Pescador Island.

The couple say they have responded to demand from guests looking to island-hop in choosing Anda for their second resort. It describes the area as "a pristine dive location with super-healthy corals, a lot of muck-diving, and marine life from XXS to XXL".

The new resort has 16 bungalows, a large pool, restaurant and bar as well as the dive centre.

Dive Worldwide is offering "Combi



Packages" at the two Magic resorts, offering savings of more than £300 per couple. The price of £1995pp based on two sharing includes flights from the UK, 13 nights' half-board accommodation (six nights at Magic Island, seven nights at Magic Oceans), 15 dives and all transfers.

Or for £50pp less you can simply spend 13 nights' half-board at Magic Oceans, with 15 boat dives each and all transfers.

► www.magicisland.nl,
www.diveworldwide.com

BIG FISH SPECIAL

Don't be misled into thinking that the Philippines is all about critters. Dive Worldwide's Big Fish Tour gives the lie to that assumption.

You need to be in the right place at the right time, and it can help with that. Covering three locations, underwater highlights of the tour include the manta rays of Ticao, the whale sharks of Donsol and the thresher sharks of Malapascua, Cebu.

The two-week experience can be undertaken year-round but the recommended months for prime wildlife encounters are between November and April. A package price from £1995pp includes flights, 11 nights' accommodation (two sharing), some meals, transfers, two whale shark snorkelling interactions and six days' diving.

► www.diveworldwide.com



ULTIMATE OFFERINGS

Tour operator Ultimate Diving has two recent Philippines additions among its offerings. The Punta Bulata Resort & Spa it describes as one of southern Negros's best-kept secrets, with a kilometre of white sand and the prospect of diving sunken islands, walls, shipwrecks and precipices.

A seven-night stay costs from £1615pp, including flights from London, transfers, B&B accommodation and 10 dives.

Ultimate is also now providing

shore-based diving holidays in marine-protected sanctuary Anilao, which it says is one of the best places in the Philippines for macro photo- and videography in a wide variety of depths.

Seven nights start at £1399pp until the end of November and comprise the same components as Punta Bulata. With both packages you can claim Ultimate's regular £50 discount by quoting "WeLoveDiving" when you book.

► www.ultimatediving.co.uk

Quest for Solitude



The Philippines is to be added alongside Palau to Solitude Liveaboards' diving service from next year. The first cruise is set for 19-28 April, when *Solitude One* leaves from Mactan for diving en route to Tubbataha. Itineraries covering both

the southern and northern Visayas will also be offered.

Solitude One has two staterooms, seven deluxe and one standard quad cabin. Full-board prices for a week aboard start from US \$2940.

► www.solitude-liveaboards.com



SHUTTERSTOCK

ISLAND-HOPPING TRIPS WITH REGALDIVE

Regaldive is providing divers visiting the Philippines with a chance to get a lot of islands under your belt in one go.

Its 11-night Philippines Island Hopping Holiday takes in Cebu, Cabilao and Dumaguete and starts from £852pp including B&B (two sharing), transfers and 16 dives with Sea Explorers. Flights can also be arranged by Regaldive.

Another option is a southern Visayas liveaboard trip aboard the *Philippines Siren* sailing yacht, with itineraries encompassing Cebu, Cabilao, Panglao, Balicasag, Pescador, Apo and Dauin and the possibility of whale shark encounters, particularly in

August and September. Seven-night boat-only packages start from £1612pp including transfers, full board twin-cabin share, 3-4 dives a day, dive-gear and nitrox if required.

The UNESCO World Heritage Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park gives access to hundreds of fish and coral species, as well as 11 types of shark, 12 dolphin and whale species and nesting hawksbill turtles, says Regaldive. Seven-night Tubbataha trips can be booked on both *Philippines Siren* and *Atlantis Azores* from £2015pp including transfers, full board and all diving.

►► www.regaldive.co.uk

Atlantis at Christmas

Atlantis, one of the best-known Philippines dive operations, has several offers available through to the end of the year, including the chance to book one guest in at the regular price at the Atlantis Puerto Galera resort and get 50% off the price for a second guest.

And if you fancy a 10-day Christmas getaway to the Philippines, it can offer a liveaboard trip departing from its Dumaguete resort on 25 December aboard the *Atlantis Azores* and arriving in time for New Year's fireworks celebration at Puerto Galera, 500 miles and a lot of diving away.

The itinerary takes in wall dives at Balicasag and Cabilao, thresher-shark dives at Malapascua; pinnacle/pelagic diving at Boracay, the Mactan car-ferry wreck and biodiverse Verde Island.

The price of US \$2695pp (two sharing) represents, says Atlantis, almost \$1000 off its average weekly liveaboard rate.

For this trip only, guests can also use a "Round Up To a Week" special offer at either of the resorts for \$1099pp extra (two sharing).

►► www.atlantishotel.com

Doctor on call

Underwater photographer and marine biologist Dr Richard Smith leads a 10-night adventure to the Philippines' "critter capital" from 20 February 2016. This group break from Dive Worldwide includes boat- and shore-diving in marine sanctuaries along the Dumaguete/Dauin coastline, where the varied marine life is said to include painted frogfish, ghost pipefish, pygmy and thorny seahorses and blue-ringed octopus. Included will be a trip to nearby Apo.

Guests stay at the Atmosphere Resort & Spa and are promised "the Philippines' finest macro diving and some truly exceptional photographic opportunities". Prices start from £2835, covering flights, 10 nights' half-board accommodation, eight days' unlimited diving, tours and transfers.

►► www.diveworldwide.com



ALEX THONGPILA

ANILAO GEEK ALERT

An 11-day workshop in Anilao for "both critter fanatics and photographers" is set for 10-20 April 2016.

The workshop is the result of a tie-up between tour operator Divequest and local dive resort Crystal Blue, located at Bagalangit in front of Marine Protected Area Arthur's Rock, which it describes as "one of the best house reefs in the region".

Much of the diving is above 15m, where an abundance of coral and marine fauna diversity is promised, along with an absence of currents and good visibility.

Wide-angle photographers won't be left out, promises Divequest, thanks to the presence of spectacular soft and hard coral reefs.

The workshop is led by Crystal Blue's photo pro Mike Bartick. You also get 10 nights' full-board (two-sharing), return transfers from Manila, 29 boat dives (air or nitrox), marine park fees, farewell party and T-shirts, and the price is £1455pp. Divequest says it can arrange the flights if requested.

►► www.divequest.co.uk



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THE WRECKS OF CORON BAY



You don't have to go inside the wrecks, but if the opportunity arises... **JOHN LIDDIARD** isn't usually the type of diver to resist

LOOKING AT THE Sangat Island Resort from out at sea, you can hardly tell it is there. Bungalows on stilts are made of local materials and, among the palm trees, just blend into the foliage. Slips beside the dive centre are visible only from an angle at which they are not eclipsed by the big rock rising from that end of the bay.

I can imagine that, with a little bit of camouflage over the solar panels, the whole place would be virtually invisible from aerial reconnaissance.

Twenty years ago, when I dived the wrecks of Coron Bay from a small liveaboard, the story was that in 1944 aerial reconnaissance detected small islands moving with the tide, thus revealing ships at anchor.

It was a great story, but as resort-owner Andy Pownall explains while pointing to photographs in the bar, it

was a fanciful embellishment. The black-and-white pictures from the attacking aircraft clearly show uncamouflaged ships returning fire.

At the time, Allied forces were advancing towards Japan through the eastern Philippines. Japanese supply ships anchored off Manila had come within range of carrier air strikes from the US fleet, and many had already been sunk.

In an effort to protect the remaining ships they were ordered to Coron Bay further to the south-west and, so the Japanese High Command thought, out of range of the carrier aircraft.

The movement was followed by US reconnaissance aircraft, and Admiral "Bull" Halsey gave the order to attack. Located 350 miles from their carriers, the aircraft would have only a short time over the target.

Pictured: Turtle by the catwalk that runs the length of the main deck of the *Okikawa Maru*.



Above, left to right:

Bangkas moored in the bay at Sangat Island Dive Resort; Furnace or fire-hole in a boiler on the *Kogyo Maru*.

Opposite page, left:

Handwheel for opening the *Morazan's* ventilation hatches.

At the time, it was the longest-range carrier air-strike ever attempted. Working in the attackers' favour, the ships at Coron were lightly defended and, when the aircraft arrived on 24 September, 1944, they were taken completely by surprise.

Twenty-two SBC2 Helldivers dive-bombed the ships with 500lb bombs while 96 F6F Wildcat fighters provided air support and strafed the decks. Ships separated to the west, the seaplane tender *Akitsuushima* and tanker *Okikawa Maru*, were the first to be bombed.

Then the attacking aircraft moved on to the main anchorage to bomb the freighters *Irako Maru*, *Olympia Maru*, *Kogyo Maru* and *Morazan*.

A second tanker, the *Kamoi Maru*, was the only large ship to survive. Though damaged by bombs, she eventually made her way to Hong Kong. A further freighter, the *Kyokuzan Maru*, was sunk outside the bay on the opposite side of Busuanga, far enough away not to be on the usual dive itinerary.

What that leaves for us divers are the wrecks of a medium-sized warship, a tanker and four other big merchant ships, a small gunboat and a small sub-chaser, all within a short boat journey of the dive centre.

The closest are fewer than 10 minutes away and the furthest 30 minutes away.

Sangat is situated at the top of Palawan, the westernmost chain of islands of the Philippines. Coron Bay is a natural anchorage separating Busuanga and the Culion Islands. The fringes of the bay are peppered with little button islands covered in dense forest.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO inside the wrecks, but if the opportunity arises... I will start my description of the diving in the middle. In the middle of my trip and in the middle of the IJNS *Akitsuushima*.

The *Akitsuushima* was a purpose-built tender for H8K Emily flying-boats. The forward part of the ship was a typical light cruiser with guns, bridge, masts and superstructure, then the aft part was a flat working deck serviced by a huge crane to lift the flying-boats on board for servicing.

Why start in the middle of the *Akitsuushima*? Because it's the most complex route I followed during my week in Coron Bay, and I saw stuff I wouldn't have found without Jojo guiding me. While I had dived the wrecks briefly 20 years ago, dive-centre manager Jojo Lorenz arrived in Coron about a year before then, and has been diving

the wrecks almost every day since.

From behind the forward gun, Jojo leads us through a hatch in the deck and we follow the magazine lift three decks down. Four helical shafts geared together provide a continuous elevator for a stream of 5in shells, one remaining fallen just out of place as a hint to its function.



Above: Rice-bowls found on the *Olympia Maru*.

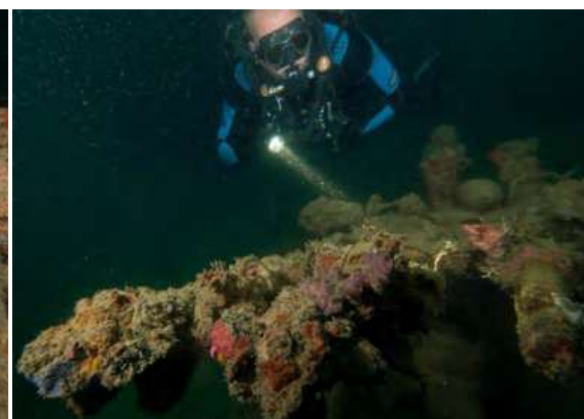
From the magazine lift we head aft, up and down decks to dodge bulkheads, and arrive at the long motor-room containing four big marine diesel engines geared to two shafts. In a merchant ship the engine-room is usually big and easily accessible through the skylights. In a military ship it is buried several decks down, and packed tightly.

Maybe I could have found my own way there, but without Jojo guiding I wouldn't have found the control console in a small compartment off the forward end, with a narrow hatch and a barred window looking out along the engines.

The way onward and out connects with a split in the working deck we had entered the day before, though on that

Below, from left: Low-pressure cylinder of the steam engine at the stern of the *Okikawa Maru*; ammunition; anti-aircraft gun at the stern of the *Akitsuushima*.

Opposite page, left: A gas mask lies amid the *Akitsuushima* wreckage.





dive we had turned aft to see the winch motor and cable drums for the flying-boat crane.

As I said, you don't have to go inside the wrecks, but if the opportunity arises... We had begun gently with the upright wrecks *Morazan* and then the *Olympia Maru*, both easily navigable steamship wrecks, nicely intact and with some easy routes through the engine-rooms and superstructures.

Outside there are guns, masts and other ship's fittings, mostly covered in a mix of hard and soft corals and with a surprising variation in resident fish. Some wrecks have enormous shoals, while others have more hidden reef life.

Jojo tells me that manta rays and even whale sharks have been sighted on the wrecks, but not often enough to be relied upon.

THE MASTS OF THE capsized *Kogyo Maru* have wafting soft corals and sponges with enormous shoals of glassfish writhing round them – a complete contrast to the bulldozer and building materials for an airfield stacked in the holds.

Even denser shoals of fish inhabit the collapsed superstructure of the *Irako*. My first dive on that wreck begins at the stern, down one deck, through some crew accommodation with portholes and a sewing machine, then through the aft holds and a broken bulkhead to the engine-room.

Cross-cut gears connect steam turbines to the propeller-shafts. Turbine drives always strike me as very compact compared to triple-expansion engines.



Above: Sponges, soft coral and glassfish on the mast of the *Kogyo Maru*.

Below: Fish above the *Irako Maru*'s superstructure.

Below right: Dive-boat.

To the port side, a small cabinet houses speaking tubes to the bridge.

Even with nitrox that is about as much deep time as we can fit into one dive, so it's up to the wafting soft corals and glassfish above, then forward for a quick look in the forecabin. To port are the heads, with a bicycle stored behind them.

The *Irako* was the most heavily



Wreck Specs

IJNS Akitsushima

4900-ton seaplane tender built by Kawasaki-Kobe in 1942. Light cruiser hull with a flat aft deck used to carry and service H8K Emily flying-boats. Four 5in guns and four 25mm anti-aircraft guns. Four diesel engines on two shafts. The wreck of an Emily rumoured to have been sunk nearby has yet to be found. Lying on port side in 38m.

Okikawa Maru

10,241-ton tanker completed in 1944 by Kawasaki-Kobe. Laid down as a type 1TL, completed as a type 2TL standard tanker. Powered by a single shaft of geared steam turbine. Type 1TL and 2TL were standardised tanker designs built from 1942 onwards, with 22 1TLs and 32 2TLs completed. Two hulls were converted to escort carriers, but never used. Upright with bow broken off in 26m.

Irako Maru

9570-ton refrigerated cargo ship built in 1941 by Kawasaki-Kobe. Equipped for transporting and supplying troops, with extensive kitchens. Powered by six boilers to two steam turbines and two shafts. Four 4.7in and ten 25mm guns. Upright in 40m.

Olympia Maru

5612-ton motor ship built in 1927 by Mitsubishi-Nagasaki. Two 25mm guns. Upright in 27m.

Kogyo Maru

6352-ton oil-fired steamship built by Uraga Dock Co in 1938. Powered by two turbines geared to a single shaft. Cargo includes a tractor, a bulldozer, a cement-mixer and various construction materials for creating an airfield. Lying on starboard side in 34m.

Morazan (Ekkai Maru)

2984-ton steamship powered by a triple-expansion engine. Built in 1908 as the *Manco* by Scott of Greenock for the Booth Line. During WW1 the *Manco* served as an auxiliary for the Royal Navy. In 1922 the ship was purchased by the Vaccaro Steamship company and renamed *Morazan*. In 1941 she was sold to Wallem & Co of Hong Kong, then seized by Japan in Shanghai on 8 December, 1941, and renamed *Ekkai Maru*. Lying on starboard side in 26m.





armed of the merchant ships and in the centre of the forecastle is a hand-cranked ammunition lift to the 5in gun platform above, just one shell at a time rather than the continuous feed on the Akitsushima.

We return to the *Irako* to see another part of the interior I can remember from 20 years ago, the kitchens.

As a troopship with a refrigerated hold for supplies, the *Irako* was fitted with kitchens on an industrial scale, one deck down to either side of the superstructure with the gallery to the engine-room descending between them.

While easier to locate than the engine-room of the *Akitsushima*, the kitchens of the *Irako* are in all ways a more serious wreck penetration.

The *Irako* is upright and the decks are beginning to compress in places. Cabins with limited access are banked with fine silt and cables hang from above. One false move and, while I am confident that I could find a way out, my chance of photographs would be curtailed.

JOJO LEADS ME AFT through the kitchens of the starboard side, pausing at mixers that would not be out of place on a building site and rice cookers almost as big as the steam turbines below.

We then cut through a narrow cross-corridor to the port side, where further kitchens have rows of big sinks and some evil-looking machines that could be meat-grinders.

I could benefit from the expertise of an Internet forum on vintage Japanese industrial kitchen machinery to do the equivalent exercise to that Alex Mustard did for the vehicles in the *Thistlegorm*.

As I said, you don't have to go inside the wrecks, but... On the tanker *Okikawa Maru* the inside parts worth exploring are the forecastle at the bow and the engine-room located all the way aft. Between these many of the oil-tanks are accessible, but even a dedicated wreck-ferret would be unlikely to find an empty oil tank interesting.

Upright, with the deck shallower than 15m, the *Okikawa* is a good location for a third dive. As we follow the deck and



catwalk aft, perhaps it is the only wreck on which I pay particular attention to the macro-life, or perhaps it really is the wreck of a billion nudibranchs (and a very tolerant turtle).

Anyway, having seen some particularly unusual slugs on a dive on which I was set up for wide-angle wreck shots, I return an afternoon later fully prepared with a macro lens. We find plenty of nudibranchs and flatworms, but no matter how hard we search, all the unusual slugs from the day before have either run away or hidden.

With six main wrecks and a couple of smaller ones, a week gives me just about enough time to see everything once and get into some of the more advanced inside routes on repeat dives.

Even so, there are things for which

Top left: The big kitchens with food-processing equipment on the *Irako Maru*.

Top right: Skylight/ventilation hatch on the *Sangat* sub-chaser.


Above: Batfish beneath the bridge deck on the *Okikawa Maru*.

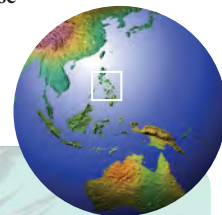
I just don't have enough dives. A few more days on location would have rounded things off nicely.

On the *Irako*, Jojo tells me that there is a fully equipped machine-shop off to the side of the engine-room that is a dive in itself. Within the lagoon at Coron are many coral reefs, but I have time only to explore reefs in passing at the gunboat and sub-chaser wreck sites.

A day trip away is a small coaster wrecked at Black Island. Some like to claim it as another Japanese wartime casualty, but it is actually a more recent Philippine vessel. Further afield is the wreck of the *Kyokuzan Maru*.

Lying on a sloping reef towards Coron are the ribs of another small wreck often referred to as a "gunboat", though again there is no evidence to connect this with the Japanese wrecks.

For something completely different there is an enclosed inland hotwater lake with barracuda, accessible via boat and a short hike up the cliffs carrying your dive-kit. And beneath the cliffs of Coron island is a fully submerged "Cathedral" cave system that combines large chambers with narrow connections. These are fitted with guide-ropes, but a guide is still essential. 



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ International flights to Manila, then an overnight stay before a domestic flight to Coron, a minibus ride to the dock, and finally transfer by *bangka* to Sangat Island.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Sangat Island Dive Resort is the only resort island offering diving facilities in Coron Bay, www.sangat.com.ph.

WHEN TO GO ▶ Year-round. The climate is driest and warmest from November to May.

MONEY ▶ Philippines *peso*.

HEALTH ▶ Cebu is malaria-free. Deco chamber in Cebu City.

PRICES ▶ Dive Worldwide can provide nine nights' full board at Sangat Island Dive Resort inclusive of 14 dives, flights and transfers for £1835pp (two sharing), www.diveworldwide.com.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.morefunphilippines.co.uk



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ROAD TO THE VISAYAS



Ten days on the road in the central Philippines, four diving hotspots covered, but it still isn't enough for **HENLEY SPIERS**

THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE, the roof was ripped right off my head as the most powerful storm ever to make landfall left me (briefly) homeless. And yet, here I was once again, back in the Philippines and ready to embark on a diving road trip.

Why? Because the diving is exceptional and I was keen to get back into the waters of the Coral Triangle, the zone of highest marine biodiversity in the world. The Philippines sit right in the middle of it.

The country, comprising more than 7000 tropical islands, has a royal flush when it comes to diving, with options to cater for every taste. I was with my girlfriend, her dive-crazy dad and her

less-dive-crazy mum. Our plan was to do a 10-day trip through the Visayas region, starting out from Cebu City.

Dive-gear packed into the truck, we wasted no time in heading to our first dive-spots.

Mactan

The small island of Mactan is connected to Cebu City by bridge, and is the closest dive location for those landing in the Philippines' second city. In fact the airport itself is on Mactan island, so it was the best place for us to make a quick stop and get back into the dive groove.

Scotty's Dive Centre, based out of the Shangri La hotel, is a diving institution in the Philippines and provided us

Pictured: A day octopus cruises the reef during a memorable drift-dive off Apo island.



Proud, dignified and warty – frogfish were a highlight of the trip with many sightings in both Mactan and Dumaguete.



A green turtle comes out to play on the house reef in Moalboal.



Three false clownfish defend their balled-up anemone on the Moalboal house reef.

with top-notch service throughout. We started with a gentle dive on the house reef which, although now protected, does bear the marks of decades of human activity.

Nevertheless, we were now back in the Coral Triangle, where the marine life even on average sites would be the envy of many others. I got excited as I spotted a pipefish, and grunted to our local guide Bernie. He seemed nonplussed, and I soon realised why – the site was littered with network pipefish!

Soon we started bumping into nudibranchs, those gloriously colourful slugs of the underwater world. Then, dancing frenetically with its face down, a juvenile harlequin sweetlips. Bertie remained quiet; he had bigger plans in store.

As we reached 20m on the slope he signalled us over and pointed out two fantastically ugly painted frogfish side by side. For a check-dive, this one was a great start.

At the tail-end of our trip we would return to Scotty's for three more dives, and be treated to more frogfish sightings. The diving in Mactan is not world-class, but it is good for a quick dive on your way in and out of the island of Cebu.

Moalboal

Our next stop was Moalboal, a municipality that has thrived since embracing diving tourism in the 1970s.

About three hours' drive from Cebu City to the west coast, you can either stay at the busier hub of Panagsama or in nearby Saavedra, which has a nicer waterfront and several resorts that cater for divers.

We preferred the idea of beachy seclusion, so ended up staying at the Blue Orchid Resort. It's a small place with 20 rooms, a nice pool, a small dive-shop and a boat. It sets a decent standard and is one of many accommodation options in the area.

Blue Orchid's biggest selling-point is its house reef. At low tide it can be accessed only via a precarious path laid out right through the corals. It's a tricky shore entry, but once navigated a diver's paradise lies at your fin-tips.

The reef quickly slopes off from the shallows and is filled with an abundance of healthy soft corals. The type of underwater landscape I have only ever seen in south-east Asia, it fills you with hope for the future of our oceans.

In among this healthy reef you will find an abundance of small critters, as well as bigger marine life.

The luxury of a house reef is that you can dive it pretty much any time, and it was close to sunset that we would have our most memorable dive.



The sky was changing from blues to purples, and I was having a great time looking for anemonefish and their homes. These shy yet aggressive characters never seem to get boring and I was particularly pleased to find three false clownfish (you know, Nemo) with their anemone stylishly balled up.

I was happy, but the dive became unforgettable when we started encountering green turtle after turtle. Best of all, they welcomed our presence and even swam with us awhile as we made our way along the sloping reef.

We were keen to explore some of the most famous dives too, and so boarded a traditional *bangka* the next day to explore Pescador island and Moalboal's very own "Sardine Run".

The current was running as we sank down along a dark, rocky wall. The drift provided an exhilarating ride for a few minutes and then slowed as we rounded a corner, allowing us to explore some of the caverns carved out of the rockface.

In one particular section, three gaps in the wall create an eerie-looking skull, enabling divers to swim in and out of the mouth- and eye-sockets.

It's the type of dive on which you might hope to see a good few pelagics, but it proved disappointing in terms of numbers of fish sighted.

As we ended the dive in the shallows, the reef around the island was in a bad state, with lots of bleached, dead and broken coral. Pescador is the most dived location in Moalboal, but based on this experience I was less impressed than I had anticipated.

But for the next dive we moored up just off the shore in Moalboal and found something pretty special. Visibility looked iffy as I looked down from the boat, but when we dropped in the greenish colour seemed to split – we had disturbed the huge layer of sardines that swam from just below the surface down to 10m.

Apparently net-fishing of the sardines had been banned and they now thrive at a site that can be shore-dived by scuba- and freedivers alike.

This is a special dive-site, and I'm already yearning to go back.



a small community on the island and a couple of dive shops but it is typically accessed by boat from Negros.

The first dive at Chapel failed to live up to our high expectations. It was adequate, with patches of very healthy corals and sightings of a snowflake moray eel, banded sea krait and a marble complex shrimp, but it lacked the wow factor, and overall just wasn't very fishy.

Our excellent guide Nadi sensed that we were a little underwhelmed, and for dive two picked the site he considers the best around the island: Coconut.

This was more like it! We dropped into a good-strength drift and within minutes had spotted a day octopus hanging out on the reef. I love octopuses, so we pretty much could have surfaced then and I would have been content, but Coconut had plenty more treats in store.

As we raced along in the current we passed a green turtle, a school of bluefin trevally, a giant trevally, big red snapper and a huge map puffer – all with the backdrop of a beautiful healthy reef. This thrilling dive was one of the highlights of the trip.

Back at the resort a different but no less interesting dive experience awaited us. Just off the shore of the hotel is a black-sand, muck-diving paradise.

Muck-diving, for the uninitiated, can appear dull at first as you stare out at the expanse of sand. As your eyes grow accustomed, however, you start spotting all the weird and wonderful creatures and fish that have adapted to this habitat.

Muck-diving is the ultimate underwater treasure-hunt.

Our first dive to this house reef embraced a who's who of muck-life – a thorny seahorse, ornate ghost pipefish, Spanish dancer nudibranch, flamboyant cuttlefish and a multitude of frogfish. I have a major soft spot for muck-diving and would treat myself to four more dives on the house reef the next day!

Cabilao

Our next visit was to the most secluded spot on our road trip. The 30-minute ride to little Cabilao island was made with the *bangka* belonging to Polaris Dive Resort, which was founded by the Bauman family in 1998 and has been growing little by little ever since.

Many of the guests we met return every year and swear that these are the healthiest reefs they have encountered. I'm not one to limit my diving to a single location but can vouch for the warm welcome, relaxed atmosphere and high-quality diving.

All around Cabilao, the reefs extend

out before dropping off steeply as sheer walls. These walls are stuffed with all manner of bright corals, sponges and seafans. Overall, Cabilao's reefs are in great shape, and as diving is the island's primary business the resort is taking good care of them. If you're into wall-diving, you'll love this location.

What will stick with me particularly are a night dive on the house reef and a site called Cathedral.

Our guide Michael grew up on Cabilao. He greeted us warmly and his friendliness was matched by his passion for diving and the local marine life.

On our initial night-dive Michael provided my first encounter with two incredible marine species. First came the swimming anemone, a tentacled spaceship spinning through the jet-black



water as it relocated to a better home. Next was the golden wentletrap, a bright yellow snail less than an inch long that uses its long snout to feed on tube coral.

Best of all, we were treated to the unique spectacle of this underwater alien absailing its way down the wall using spider-like thread!

Cathedral started out as a regular wall dive, but the highlight came in the shallower second half of the dive, where the sea had carved out an intricate set of wide tunnels.

Small breaks in the rock let through rays of light that bathe the sandy bottom and lead you through the system. In one section, the high ceiling and windows of light created an ethereal scene that resembled an underwater shrine.

It was one last great dive on a trip of many, but unfortunately the time had come to head home. The Visayas region is a kaleidoscope of world-class diving and we had only scratched its surface.

As with most successful blockbusters these days, I'm pretty sure a sequel to our road trip will be coming soon.

Dumaguete & Apo

After three days in Moalboal we headed to Dumaguete. The coastal route down through the southern parts of Cebu is a visual feast, so we took our time in reaching Santander, from where we took a ferry across to the island of Negros.

We arrived at Thalatta Resort in time for a hearty dinner cooked up by its Swiss chef. Next day we got through all the practicalities at the excellent in-house dive centre, and headed to Apo island.

Apo has been declared a marine reserve and is one of the most famous dive-spots in the Visayas. There is

Above: The sardines scatter as a diver descends in Moalboal.

Below: Bubble coral at the same site.

Below right: 'Tentacled spaceship' – a swimming anemone on the night-dive at Cabilao.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Cathay Pacific flies from London to Cebu via Hong Kong, or get there via Manila with Philippine Airlines or Cebu Pacific. Road transfers can be organised by the dive operator or resort.

DIVING ▶ Mactan: Scotty's www.divescotty.com. Moalboal: Many options depending where you stay. Dumaguete: Negros Divers, www.negrosdivers.com. Cabilao: Polaris Beach & Dive Resort, www.polaris-dive.com.

ACCOMMODATION ▶ Mactan: Options for all budgets. Moalboal: Blue Orchid can be booked via Agoda. Dumaguete: Thalatta Beach & Dive Resort, www.thalattaresort.com. Cabilao: Polaris Beach & Dive Resort, www.polaris-dive.com.

WHEN TO GO ▶ Year-round but driest and warmest November to May.

MONEY ▶ Philippines peso.

PRICES ▶ Return flights to Cebu cost just under £700. Customise trip from there.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.morefunphilippines.co.uk



F3 800



Three cylinder but no trimix needed.



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STOP STUMBLIN' IN THE DARK

25 dive-lamps, but what a range of shapes, sizes, functions, colours and prices this generation of LED lights embraces! NIGEL WADE weighs up the contenders and compares their beams



IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT PAST, our forbears were stumbling around in the dark with a simple flame from either a candle or an oil-lamp to light the way.

Lighting technology has moved a long way since those dark days (and even darker nights). The electric light-bulb replaced naked flames at the turn of the 20th century and reigned supreme for nearly 100 years until an alternative to this incandescent light was found.

The breakthrough came in 1962 when scientist Nick Holonyak Jr invented the first visible-spectrum light-emitting diode (LED). Red diodes came first, followed by pale yellow and green. Then, in the 1990s, the blue diode was invented. This led to white LEDs, from blue diodes coated with phosphor.

Researchers then soon found that by combining red, green and blue diodes, white light could be produced. An LED revolution ensued, the new discovery being applied to traffic lights, flashlights, TVs and much else.

The past five years have seen the biggest evolution of the LED. The quest to reduce energy usage and greenhouse-gas emissions

has seen substantial boosts in LED light output that also requires less energy.

Portable power technology has mirrored the LED's evolution, with demand for batteries to power the latest electronic gizmos and gadgets such as smartphones and tablets leading to a reduction in physical size, and an increase in power output and the lifespan of reusable batteries.

All this new technology has naturally cascaded down to the portable lighting world, with smaller devices producing brighter light for longer and at lower cost.

It seems only yesterday that the only dive-lights available were used for one purpose, to see our way in a dark underwater environment. There was little choice of brightness level, and the holy grail was to get durations (burntimes) above an hour.

Battery-packs were, by today's standards, huge, as were the torch bodies needed to house them.

Oh, how times have changed!

THE TESTS

Putting together a number of dive-lights to test proved a daunting mission. There are so many makes, models and genres, making them difficult to compare.

The obvious solution was to measure each one's light output in lumens, but this proved more complex than expected, and it soon became apparent that I would need specialist measuring equipment costing tens of thousands of pounds

(and a degree in lighting science), or laboratory facilities and a scientist to conduct the measuring procedure, which would cost almost as much.

So I settled on 25 lights, comparing each one by photographing the beams illuminating a white surface.

For consistent results I used a camera set on a tripod, in the same position and with the same settings throughout. The lights were positioned in exactly the same way. The resulting images are straight from the camera, with no post-processing other than preparation for printing.

The lights are ranked by price. The various functions of each one have been given a symbol so that they can be identified at a glance.



DIVE TORCH: A light that can be hand-held to light the way. Tight beam

angles are the preference, because the narrow shaft of light cuts through turbid water without reflecting suspended particles and reducing the visible range (akin to driving in fog with the car's main beam on).



FOCUS LIGHT: Modern digital camera focus

systems rely on contrast in the subject to determine accurately the exact focus distance and return the sharpest results. A bright even light to illuminate the subject and increase the contrast can help the camera to focus. If an external camera flash is used, the torchlight is overcome and can't be seen as a hotspot in the final image.



RED FOCUS LIGHT:

Red light is almost invisible to species such as the shy mandarin fish but it still enhances contrast and allows the camera to focus. External camera flashes overcome the red light, leaving no trace in the final image.



VIDEO LIGHT: To

capture vibrant true colours when shooting movie sequences, bright, wide-angle, constant light coverage of a scene is needed. Dull or bright hotspots will appear in the footage, so a smooth, even beam is essential. The wider the beam-angle, the more of the scene will be illuminated.



ULTRA-VIOLET LIGHT:

Underwater flora, fauna and some marine animals give off fluorescent proteins when excited by an ultra-violet glow. To see or capture this fluorescence on camera, a yellow filter is usually needed for mask or lens.



FLASHING SOS LIGHT:

The internationally recognised dot-dot-dot, dash-dash-dash Morse Code for SOS can be a life-saver if you're ever in the unfortunate position of being lost at the surface or trapped under water.



FLASHING STROBE LIGHT:

A bright flashing light is useful when visibility is reduced. It can be attached to a shotline or exit point to aid in navigating your way back to boat or shore.



A shrimp displays fluorescence when excited by UV light.

STATE OF THE ART

The 25 lights featured here represent a cross-section of the marketplace. If a picture does paint a thousand words the beam photos tell the story, and, I hope, provide an accurate guide to the capabilities of each light.

Some have a specific task, others multiple tasks. I wasn't surprised to discover that every light on this test produced a quality of illumination that outshone (pun intended) the lamps of yesteryear. You'd be hard-pushed even to find an

underwater torch that uses halogen or gas discharge (HID) bulbs in stores nowadays.

Batteries have also evolved. Rechargeable lithium-ion units are almost standard fare, and are very reliable. Long life-spans and high outputs make them a viable option to factory-fit and seal into torch bodies.

I think USB-type chargers in tandem with sealed battery-packs are the future. Nearly everyone has a smartphone or tablet that uses a USB adapter, which means cutting back on spare batteries and charger hardware, especially when travelling.

The LED and battery revolution has been fast, total and overwhelming in the world of lights, and it's still evolving.

Now there are rumours of aluminium air batteries that run for two weeks and are replenished by water. Imagine that, partnered with an LED that delivers 20,000 lumens of light – brilliant! Watch this space.



Candela (cd)

The unit of luminous intensity, or the light emitted from a source, has superseded "candlepower", which measured luminance relative to the output of a candle of specific size and composition. As this is a measure of intensity as it leaves its source, it is unaffected by distance.

JARGON-BUSTER

Lumens (lm)

The unit of luminous flux is the measure of the total light output by a light source in every direction, corrected to ignore wavelengths not perceived by the human eye. Basically it's the total amount of visual light generated by a source.

Lux (lx)

Lux is the unit of luminance, a measure of the intensity of light hitting a surface at a given distance. It's equivalent to watts per square metre but corrected according to the human perception – it's how much a torch (or other source) can light up a 1sq m area at whatever distance, usually quoted in the format "2000 lux at 10m".

Burntime

The length of time the energy source powers the light is also known as the runtime, and is usually measured using the batteries sold with the lamp or recommended by the manufacturer. The runtime cut-off is defined as the moment when the light output is only 10% of its maximum.

Colour temperature (K)

The quality of light isn't only about brightness but also colour temperature (measured in °Kelvin). To mimic the sun's colour temperature (daylight), an artificial light needs to have a colour temperature of around 5600°K. Cooler blue light has a higher Kelvin rating, and warm red light a lower one.



Mask-strap-mounted red light won't destroy night vision.



Hand-mounted light for reading instruments.



Hand-mounted UV lamp.



A narrow beam angle is best to see through turbid water.

Exposure Marine XS100-Red Night Vision & XS100-Blue Fluo Dive

£65



Functions: Hand- or mask-mounted night-vision or UV
Max output: 50 lm
Power levels: High, low
Beam angle: Not specified
Colour temp: n/a
Battery: CR123 rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: High 1hr, low 10hr
Switching: Screw-down head
Travel lock: No, requires battery removal

Material: Anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 55 x 24mm dia, 39g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.ultimatesportsengineering.com

Notes: For mask-strap, head- or wrist-mounting. Red model useful on mask at night to illuminate instruments or camera controls. Supplied with spare battery and USB charger. UV Blue Fluo model requires yellow mask filter.



Tovatec Ultra III

£66



Functions: Hand-held dive-light
Max output: 500 lm
Power levels: 100%
Beam angle: 14°
Colour temp: 6000°K – 7000°K
Battery: 6 x AA alkaline or rechargeable ni-mh
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 6hr
Switching: Magnetic slide switch
Travel lock: No, requires battery removal

Material: Anodised aluminium
Size/weight: 226 x 51mm dia
Depth rating: 120m
Contact: www.tovatec.com

Notes: Suitable for primary recreational use or back-up technical dive-light.



Tovatec IFL WA Zoom-R

£68



Functions: Variable-beam dive-light
Max output: 300lm
Power levels: One
Beam angle: 9° - 45°
Colour temp: 5000°K – 6000°K
Battery: 2x CR123
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 3hr
Switching: Magnetic slide switch
Travel lock: No, requires battery removal
Material: Anodised aluminium

Size/weight: 159 x 38mm dia, 238g
Depth rating: 120m
Contact: www.tovatec.com

Notes: Sliding-head sleeve with convex lens for zoom function. Removing sleeve increases beam angle for use with action-style video-cams.



Dive Rite BX-1 LED

£80



Functions: Primary dive-light
Max output: LUX 12400
Power levels: One
Beam angle: 8°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: 3 x AAA alkaline or ni-mh rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 2hr with alkaline AAA, 4hr with lithium AAA batteries
Switching: Screw-down head
Travel lock: No, battery removal

Material: Marine-grade anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 127 x 43mm dia, 200g
Depth rating: 150m
Contact: www.diverite.com

Notes: Can be used as primary recreational dive-light or technical back-up light. Comes with a wrist lanyard.



Scubapro Nova 700R

£89



Functions: Hand-held dive-light
Max output: 700 lm
Power levels: One
Beam angle: Not specified
Colour temp: 6000°K
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion polymer (LiPo)
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 2.5hr
Switching: Screw-down head
Travel lock: No, requires battery removal

Material: Anodised aluminium
Size/weight: 133 x 42mm dia, 200g without battery
Depth rating: 300m
Contact: www.scubapro.com

Notes: Suitable for use as primary light for recreational dives or back-up technical lamp. Comes with wrist lanyard.



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Subgear Sector 5 LED

£109



Functions: Pistol-grip dive-light
Max output: 550 lm
Power levels: One
Beam angle: Not specified
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: 4 x C cell alkaline or rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 3hr
Switching: Trigger-style switch
Travel lock: Yes, mechanical lever

Material: Impact-resistant polycarbonate
Size/weight: 120 x 75mm excluding pistol grip, 700g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.subgear.de

Notes: Smaller brother of Sector 7, which is powered by eight C cell batteries, has 700 lumens output and weighs just over 1kg.

UK SL4 eLED UV-395

£109



Functions: Fluorescence, spot
Max output: 500mW
Power levels: One
Beam angle: Not specified
Colour temp: n/a
Battery: 4 x C cell alkaline / LR14
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 10hr
Switching: Lever switch
Travel lock: No, battery removal
Material: ABS and polycarbonate

Size/weight: 157 x 60mm, head dia 50mm, 426g
Depth rating: 150m
Contact: www.uwkinetics.com

Notes: Standard UK SL4 dive-light fitted with optional UV-395 head that delivers ultra-violet light at a wavelength of 395 nanometres and doesn't require yellow filters to view fluorescence effects.

Light & Motion GoBe 500 spot

£145



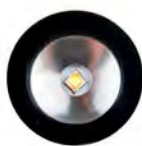
Functions: Primary dive-light, focus light, SOS
Max output: 500 lm
Power levels: High, med, low, extended
Beam angle: 20°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Factory-sealed Li-ion
Battery-level indicator: Yes, single LED, green, yellow, red
Stated burntimes: High 1.5hr, med 3hr, low 12hr, ext 24hr, SOS 36hr
Switching: Sealed push-button

Travel lock: Yes, twist-lock at rear
Material: ABS polymer body, anodised alloy head
Size/weight: 122 x 45mm dia, 160g
Depth rating: 120m
Contact: www.lightandmotion.com

Notes: System light with platform compatible with six interchangeable light-heads including red focus, wide, search and UV Nightsea. Compatible with 25mm ball, lockline and YS-mounts. Charging via USB cable and gold-plated connections.

Bigblue AL 1000XWP

£150



Functions: Action-cam video light, focus, SOS
Max output: 1000 lm
Power levels: 100 lm, 250 lm, 500 lm, 1000 lm
Beam angle: 120°
Colour temp: 6500°K
Battery: Li-ion rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: Yes, blue, green, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: 100L 20hr, 250L 10hr, 500L 5hr, 1000L 2hr
Switching: Multi-function push-button

Travel lock: No, requires battery removal
Material: Anti-corrosive anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 127 x 39mm dia, 170g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.liquidsports.co.uk

Notes: Compact light that's suitable for GoPro-style action-cam use. The light is supplied with removable red and yellow flip filters, wrist lanyard and mains battery charger. A two-arm camera tray, with ball fittings complete with two AL 1000XWP lights, is available as a system.

Intova Action Video Light

£150



Functions: Action-cam video light, SOS, strobe
Max output: 640 lm
Power levels: Full, med, low
Beam angle: 120°
Colour temp: 6000°K – 6500°K
Battery: Rechargeable Li-ion
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: Full 2hr, med 3hr, low 4hr
Switching: Single multi-function push-button

Travel lock: No, requires battery removal
Material: Polycarbonate body, aluminium alloy head
Size/weight: 146 x 57mm dia, 179g
Depth rating: 60m
Contact: www.intova.net

Notes: Comes with tray and standard tripod screw for mounting Intova action video cams. Features slow and fast strobe flashing modes as well as SOS mode.

UK Aqualite-S 20

£155


Functions: Primary dive-light
Max output: 500 lm
Power levels: 100%, 40%, 15%
Beam angle: 20°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion, remove to charge
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 100% 1.5hr, 40% 5.6hr, 15% 9hr
Switching: Rear push-button

Travel lock: No, remove battery for travel
Material: Impact-resistant polymers with Hydralum head
Size/weight: 147 x 37mm dia, 396g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.uwkinetics.com

Notes: Comes with adjustable rubber hand-mount and USB/mains charger. Optional heads for 90° wide or UV functions.



UK Aqualite Pro 100°

£246


Functions: Wide-angle SOS
Max output: 1200 lm
Power levels: 100%, 60%, 40%, 25%.
Beam angle: 100°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion, remove to charge
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 100% 1.1hr, 60% 2.2hr, 40% 3.3hr, 25% 12hr
Switching: Rear-toggle power dial

Travel lock: No, remove battery for travel
Material: Impact-resistant polymers with a Hydralum head
Size/weight: 127 x 37mm dia, 222g
Depth rating: 150m
Contact: www.uwkinetics.com

Notes: Comes with 25mm ball-arm, swivel and fixed mounts for GoPro-style mounts, and USB/mains charger. Optional heads available for red, UV or spot-beam functions.



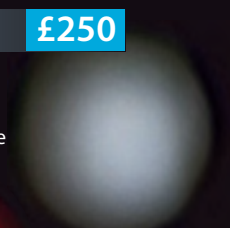
FIT LED 120WSR

£250

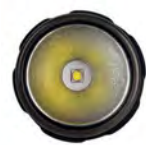

Functions: Wide-angle video, spot, red, SOS
Max output: 1200 lm
Power levels: Three for wide, spot, red, one for SOS
Beam angle: Wide, red 120°, spot 15°
Colour temp: 5700°K
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion, remove for charging
Battery-level indicator: Yes – green, yellow, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: At full power, wide 1hr, spot 2.5hr, red 5hr

Switching: Twin buttons
Travel lock: Battery removal
Material: Hard-anodised aero-grade aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 125 x 50mm dia, 220g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.uwvisions.com

Notes: Overheat function whereby smart electronics reduce light output to prevent damage if high temperature detected. 25mm ball-mount standard.



Metalsub XRE-1200

£250


Functions: Hand-held primary dive-light
Max output: 1200 lm
Power levels: 100%, 60%, 30%, 10%
Beam angle: 10°
Colour temp: 5700°K
Battery: Sealed LiFePo4
Battery-level indicator: Yes, LED green, orange, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: 100% 100min
Switching: Multi-function push-button

Travel lock: Yes, remove rear cap
Material: Hard-anodised aluminium
Size/weight: 250 x 49mm dia, 480g
Depth rating: 250m
Contact: www.cpspartnership.co.uk

Notes: Supplied with MP1200 wireless contact-charging cradle with mains and 12V car-charger leads.



Inon LF800-N

£290


Functions: Spotlight
Max output: 800 lm
Power levels: Full 800L, low 300L
Beam angle: 5°
Colour temp: 5000K
Battery: 3 x AA alkaline or ni-mh rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 90min full, 265min low (Eneloop Pro batteries)
Switching: Rotary
Travel lock: Yes

Material: Aluminium alloy, rigid Almite
Size/weight: 145 x 60mm dia, 270g
Depth rating: 120m
Contact: www.inonuk.com

Notes: Comes with hand lanyard or can be mounted using YS-style adaptor. Also compatible with Inon screw-in colour filter or condensing lens sets. Tight beam said to be suitable for macro photography, giving snoot-style lighting.



Inon LF1100-W

£315



Functions: Wide-angle
Max output: 1100 lm
Power levels: Full, low
Beam angle: 85°, 95° with wide filter
Colour temp: 5000K
Battery: 3 x AA alkaline or ni-mh rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 50min full, 235min low (Eneloop Pro batteries)
Switching: Rotary switch

Travel lock: Yes
Material: Aluminium alloy, rigid Almite
Size/weight: 127 x 48mm dia, 258g
Depth rating: 120m
Contact: www.inonuk.com

Notes: Supplied with hand lanyard or can be mounted using YS-style adaptor. Also compatible with Inon screw-in wide (pictured) or colour-filter lens sets.

Bigblue VTL 2800P

£325



Functions: Flood, spot, red
Max output: 2800 lm
Power levels: Flood 100%, 50%, 25% and 10%, spot 100%, red 100%
Beam angle: Flood, red 120°, spot 10°
Colour temp: 6500°K
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion, remove for charging
Battery-level indicator: Yes – blue, green, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: Flood 100% 1.5hr, 50% 3hr, 25% 6hr, 10% 15hr

Switching: Single multi-function button
Travel lock: No, requires battery removal
Material: Anti-corrosive anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 140 x 55mm dia, 432g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.liquid.sports.co.uk

Notes: Overheat protection system. Mounting options include "hands-free" Goodman-style glove, 25mm ball, lanyard.

Bersub Variled 6X2

£345



Functions: Primary dive-light
Max output: 1600 lm
Power levels: 100%, 50%
Beam angle: 12°
Colour temp: 4300°K
Battery: 6 x AA alkaline or ni-mh rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 100% 2hr, 50% 4hr (depends on battery type)
Switching: Watertight self-cleaning micro-switch

Travel lock: Yes
Material: Marine-grade anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 130mm x 70mm dia, 550g
Depth rating: 300m
Contact: www.bersub.com

Notes: Patented safety valve for battery-gas discharge. Can be mounted to camera-arm systems with addition of 25mm ball, lockline or YS-adaptor for use as focus light.

Exposure Marine Sub M3

£350



Functions: Motion activated dive-light with flash and SOS
Max output: 1800 lm
Power levels: High, med, low
Beam angle: 20°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Factory-sealed li-ion
Battery-level indicator: OLED digital display in hr/min
Stated burntimes: High 2hr, med 10hr, low 24hr
Switching: Combined capacitive and motion switching

Travel lock: Yes, motion-activated
Material: Anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 113 x 47mm dia, 240g
Depth rating: 200m
Contact: www.ultimatesportsengineering.com

Notes: No mechanical switch, responds to sequence of taps or rotary movement. OLED digital screen at rear displays output level, lock and battery time remaining. Charges via gold-plated two-pin contacts and USB cable with mains adaptor. Red or black, supplied with neoprene wrist-mount.

Bersub Variled 6 Neutral Wide 90

£360



Functions: Wide-angle video
Max output: 1600 lm
Power levels: 100%, 50%
Beam angle: 90°
Colour temp: 4300°K
Battery: 6 x AA alkaline or ni-mh rechargeable
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 100% 2hr, 50% 4hr (depends on battery type)
Switching: Watertight self-cleaning micro-switch

Travel lock: Yes
Material: Marine-grade anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 130mm x 70mm dia, 550g
Depth rating: 300m
Contact: www.bersub.com

Notes: Patented safety valve for battery-gas discharge. Can be mounted to camera-arm systems with addition of 25mm ball, lockline or YS adaptor. GoPro can be mounted directly to handle.

Tovatec Galaxy Video Light

£360


Functions: Wide-angle video
Max output: 2500 lm
Power levels: 100%, 50%, 30%
Beam angle: 140°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Removable, rechargeable li-ion
Battery-level indicator: No
Stated burntimes: 100% 1hr, 50% 2hr, 30% 3hr

Switching: Rotating magnetic switch
Travel lock: Yes
Material: Anodised aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 112 x 70mm dia, 700g
Depth rating: 122m
Contact: www.tovatec.com

Notes: Comes with YS mount in hard foam-lined zip case.

FIT LED 2500 Flare Video

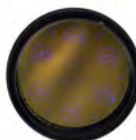
£415


Functions: Wide-angle video, spot, red, UV, SOS
Max output: 2500 lm
Power levels: Three for wide, spot, red, one for UV, SOS
Beam angle: Wide, red, UV 120°, spot 15°
Colour temp: 5700°K
Battery: Rechargeable li-ion, remove for charging
Battery-level indicator: Yes, green, yellow, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: At full power, wide 1hr, spot 2.5hr, red 5hr, UV 5hr

Switching: Twin buttons with battery indicator
Travel lock: Battery removal
Material: Hard-anodised aero-grade aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 125 x 50mm dia, 220g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.uwvisions.com

Notes: Overheat function, YS-type mount standard.

Light & Motion Sola Nightsea

£565


Functions: Fluorescence, flood, spot
Max output: Radiant flux 3000mW
Power levels: High 3000mW, med 1500mW, low 750mW
Beam angle: Flood 60°, Spot 12°
Colour temp: n/a
Battery: Factory-sealed li-ion
Battery-level indicator: Yes – green, amber, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: High 70min, med 140min, low 280min
Switching: Slide switch

Travel lock: Yes
Material: Impact-resistant polymers
Size/weight: 104 x 56mm dia, 254g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.lightandmotion.com

Notes: Comes with phosphor filter that converts blue UV to white light, allowing use for navigation. Yellow mask or camera filter required to see or record true fluorescence effects.

Light & Motion Sola Video 3000 F

£645


Functions: Flood, SOS
Max output: 3000 lm
Power levels: High 3000 lm, med 1250 lm, low 625 lm
Beam angle: 90°
Colour temp: Not specified
Battery: Factory-sealed lithium-ion
Battery-level indicator: Yes – green, amber, red, flashing red
Stated burntimes: High 60min, med 120min, low 240min
Switching: Slide switch
Travel lock: Yes

Material: Impact-resistant polymers
Size/weight: 144 x 89mm dia, 265g
Depth rating: 100m
Contact: www.lightandmotion.com

Notes: Available with black or white (pictured) body colours. Mounts include 25mm ball, lockline and ballistic hand-strap options. Can be fully charged from flat in 1hr 45min via supplied multi-voltage 2A mains fast charger

Keldan Video 8X

£1335


Functions: Professional video
Max output: 10,000 lm
Power levels: Five from 28 - 105W
Beam angle: 110°
Colour temp: 5000°K
Battery: Removable li-ion 14.4V, 6.2Ah battery-pack
Battery-level indicator: Yes, LED display on battery-pack
Stated burntimes: 45 - 170min
Switching: Twist-ring on light-head

Travel lock: Yes, locks twist-ring
Material: Anodised marine-grade aluminium alloy
Size/weight: 235 x 72mm dia, 900g
Depth rating: 200m
Contact: www.keldanlights.com

Notes: Comes with polycarbonate female YS-mount adapter and mains battery-charger. Spare battery-packs £285

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BE THE CHAMP!



Plenty of technical exercises in photography can be practised and perfected under water in normal conditions, but when you have to contend with a current it becomes more problematic, says

ALEX MUSTARD

'Kicking into a **current** and **fiddling** with camera settings and strobe positions is a **recipe for frustration**'

NO CURRENT, NO FUN!" beams Semi our Fijian dive guide, flashing a grin as bright as the tropical sun. I am pretty sure that his usual end-of-briefing tagline is designed to remind us that although moving water makes diving more challenging, it certainly brings dive-sites to life.

In-water skills such as buoyancy and stability are essential for underwater photography. Most important of all, they help to preserve the beautiful environments we explore.

More directly, they benefit our images by helping us to avoid stirring up clouds of backscatter and letting us position our camera carefully to unlock the best compositions.

Stability is particularly important for macro photography, where we need to accurately focus and compose a photo on the millimetre scale.

Our body control is also really valuable in wide-angle photography, not so much for our framing, but for our lighting. If we are not stable in the water, our camera is never in the same place twice. In essence, we are chasing a moving target, and any changes we make to our lighting won't have their intended effects.

In short, a stable photographer is an able photographer.

Currents and surge test the diving skills of everyone, but are a fiercer

challenge for underwater photographers because we typically need to manoeuvre close for our pictures, and we need stability once we are there.

Underwater photographers definitely have a love-hate relationship with moving water. This month's column is here to help you get more of the former and less of the latter.

MOVING WATER breathes life into the underwater world – soft corals unfurl, polyps of seafans open, fish line up and big beasts appear. This is the time to take stunning shots, but we need to know our adversary for the best results!

Below: Exposed oceanic islands, particularly those of the East Pacific, are hotspots for marine life. Shooting there means taking on currents and surge.

Taken with Nikon D2X and Tokina 10-17mm. Subal housing. Subtronic Alpha strobes. ISO 100, 1/250th @ f/7.1.

Surge is caused when the large waves of ocean swells move into the shallow water. Friction with the seabed turns the circular water motion of waves into the backwards and forwards motion of swell.

Walls, rocky gullies and the spur-and-groove formations of coral reefs actually intensify this movement, and as a diver you can find yourself flying backwards and forwards.

Surge makes photography very difficult, and it is tempting to just avoid it. Unfortunately, the small Pacific islands like Galapagos, Socorro, Cocos and Malpelo that are renowned for surge are also famed for spectacular marine life. There are times when you just have to take it on.

Fortunately, surge is easy to predict before a dive. If you can see large, long waves on the surface and the dive is going to be on the exposed side of an island or reef, in shallower depths, then swell is likely.

Under water you can minimize its impact by going a bit deeper, or by swimming to the sheltered side of a reef or rocky pinnacle.

Surge intensifies close to the topography, so keep a little distance when you can, set up for the shot and then move in.

CURRENTS ARE less problematic, although they can build up to a point at which photography becomes impossible. Sometimes we have to go with the flow and capture images only in our minds.

Many currents are driven by tides, and experienced captains will put you on sites at slack water, or when the current is running in a favourable direction.

British dives are commonly dictated by the tides. Many UK skippers study them in detail and will make sure you hit the best sites in the best conditions.

STARTER TIP

Safety is paramount when diving in more challenging conditions. No underwater photograph is worth risking your life for.

Two of the hardest skills to learn as a photographer are when not to take your camera on a dive and when to say no to a dive completely.

It is always better to be on the boat wishing to be under water than *vice versa*.



Pictured: Currents bring out the best in the underwater world and snap messy fish schools into line.

Taken with Nikon D4 and Nikon 20mm. Subal housing. 2 x Seacam 150 strobes. ISO 400, 1/250th @ f/11.



Timing is particularly important when shore-diving the necks of sea-lochs, which harbour incredibly rich life, but require precisely timed dives.

Overseas dive operators tend to be less driven by tides and more by their daily schedule. They will certainly avoid dropping you in with the strongest currents, but far more is left to chance, which does not give you the time to change your camera.

Once under water, the complex topography of dive-sites means that there will always be areas where the water is squeezed and currents are strongest, and also areas for shelter.

Currents often cause back-eddies, downstream of where the topography juts out into the flow.

You can exploit these to navigate against the flow or hold position, with minimal effort, in a prime spot.

MID-WATER TIP

In moving water, use your brain as much as your fins. You will never out-muscle the ocean.

Fortunately there is always protection from moving water somewhere on a site. Try to shoot in the protection, or at least set up for your shot in sheltered areas.

Above: Moving water is adored by fish of all sizes. Many of the best shark encounters occur on dive sites exposed to current and surge.

Taken with Nikon D2X and Tokina 10-17mm. Subal housing. Subtronic Alpha strobes. ISO 100, 1/30th @ f/16.

PLANNING FOR the conditions and keeping things simple are the keys to successful images in moving water. Kicking into a current and fiddling with camera settings and strobe positions is a recipe for frustration.

Instead, set up your camera for a specific shot, and then drift along shooting it again and again.

The image will be the same technically, but the subject matter will constantly change, brought to you on the current conveyor.

When approaching a promising scene, fin gently against the current to slow your pass, take a few frames and drift on. Wide-angle is always easier to shoot than macro in moving water.

In strong currents I will often shoot my fisheye from the hip, holding my camera out and aiming it the scenes without looking through the viewfinder.

This is surprisingly reliable with a bit of practice. Ultimately it is better to get a shot that needs a crop than no shot at all.

Fish can be one of the least co-operative underwater subjects, but few things whip them into photogenic formations like a current.

Often you can hide in the lee of the reef planning the shot and setting up your camera before swimming into the flow, puffing and panting to get the shot.


ADVANCED TIP

Scenery blooms in the current, but working with a model is very challenging because the photographer and model, positioned on either side of the subject, will experience opposite currents.

It is much easier to hold position swimming into the current, so ask your model to do this while you shoot with the current at your back.

CURRENT HOOKS are not ideal for photography, but on some of the world's best big-animal dives the dive operators demand them. Drift-dives, such as Blue Corner in Palau or in the passes of atolls in places such as the Maldives or French Polynesia are spectacular, but many dives are planned with time hooked in.

For a diver, hooking in and watching the show is great, but for photographers it can be frustrating. Hooking in normally leaves you and the fish both facing into the current, meaning you will only get butt shots!

Attach your hook to the side of your BC, which will rotate you on your side, allowing you to shoot the subjects as they swim towards and past you. 

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SHARK-FEEDING: *RIGHT*



In an extract from his new book *Shark Bytes*, **JOHN BANTIN** tackles this controversial issue head-on

WHEN FAMOUS natural-world photographer Michael Aw was bitten on the wrist during a shark-feed dive in 2013, I was amazed at the outpouring of anger and vitriol towards him on the Internet – mainly from people who had never experienced such a dive but had strong opinions as to why it was wrong to feed sharks for the purpose of photography.

It was ironic that he had actually been bitten by a small grouper rather than by a shark.

Shark feeds always attract other fishes that hover around in the hope of getting some scraps left by the sharks, and nearly all carnivorous fish have teeth. Any are capable of giving you a nasty bite if you are so unlucky.

Recently, on a liveaboard in the Maldives, I happened to show some close-up shark pictures that were on my computer from a previous trip.

"We don't believe in shark-feeding," the dive guides commented rather snootily. We then spent 30 dives seeing

plenty of sharks but only at the periphery of our vision, and certainly none close enough to photograph.

Our last dive was a night dive. The dive-guides dropped in a punctured can of fish cleanings, and two dozen nurse sharks and numerous assorted big rays competed for what smelt like a free meal.

It was frenetic and the best dive of the trip, but what was it if it was not shark-feeding?

Is it a sensible idea to stage these shark feeds for the benefit of attending divers?

It seems that many modern-day divers have very mixed feelings about methods of getting close-up and personal with sharks. They want to say that they have dived with sharks but many don't want them close enough to see properly, or for them to feel it's they that have been seen by the sharks.

Dive-guides in the Red Sea will protest that they get plenty of close-up interaction with sharks without baiting, but these are oceanic whitetip sharks that are ocean wanderers and opportunistic

feeders. They will make a close pass at anything, including a diver, to see if it's a potential meal. Interactions are exciting but brief in the extreme.

On the other hand, the big populations of grey reef sharks and other reef species have generally long since gone from Egyptian waters.

Most sharks are cautious. That's how they get to grow old in a shark-eat-shark world, and size matters.

DIVERS ARE USUALLY BIGGER IN comparison to most sharks, and sharks usually prefer to stay away from them rather than risk injury from what might be another large predator.

Offering some bait is generally the order of the day. Of course, there are many different ways to do it. Bearing in mind that sharks tend to be big animals with mouths full of sharp teeth, my opinion of the different methods I have seen around the world is quite variable, from the orderly method of using one piece of bait at a time at the end of a short

OR WRONG?

spear, as developed by Stuart Cove, to the rather risky methods I witnessed in French Polynesia.

There, the dive guide carried a severed mahi-mahi head under his BC and would cut bits off with a knife, offering it in his bare hand to passing hungry sharks.

I questioned if this was not just a bit too risky. I think he finally agreed, after he had his hand sewn back together later.

Probably more sharks get fed by divers in Bahamian waters than anywhere else. I recently spoke about the latest generation of shark-feeders with Graham Cove, Stuart Cove's cousin, who used to feed sharks for the benefit of my camera when he was a younger man.

Then, he went in protected only by chain-mail gloves and arms, offering the bait at the end of a short spear.

Today, the feeders at Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas do the same, but wear full chain-mail suits and helmets.

I asked him what he thought about those people who were so against shark-feeding. He said: "I'm sick of people

living in cubicles looking at YouTube and chiming in with rubbish on things they know nothing about.

"It's crazy how people generate opinions not based on observation and sensible thought, but more on a 30-second spot on the Internet."

I asked him if he thought that every operation was doing it in a safe way, and he replied: "I have found myself questioning it from time to time. Stuart has it down to a science, yet I find many other dive operators don't take the same care or precautions to keep it safe in the long term. There are examples of lack of organisation and dedication to safety and longevity of a dive area."

What about the people doing it, the feeders themselves? Are they doing it for the thrill or the glamour?

Most of them sustain a bite at some time, and I've noticed they soon lose their enthusiasm for it afterwards.

Graham said: "Now that the shark-feeders have full suits and helmets, everyone wants to do it. Even so,

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when I was back at Stuart's recently, it was clear that some people did not have a gift for it, though."

We hear all sorts of arguments about how sharks lose their ability to hunt naturally if they are fed. I would suggest that the amount of food offered at a typical shark feed is tiny in proportion to the number of sharks present, so it represents nothing more than a free snack.

According to shark behaviourist Erich Ritter, a bull shark needs to eat 4% of its own body weight in fish each day. That means some of these animals are eating up to 14kg. So with 30 sharks at a feed, the feeder would need to take in 340kg of fish-cuts to substitute for their normal feeding behaviour, whereas around 9kg is a generous estimation of what they actually use at Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas feeds.

SHARKS HAVE A HIERARCHY and defer to larger sharks. None of them wants to get injured by another shark, so when dead bait is offered, there is little sense of competition among the animals.

When I, in years gone by, compared the different shark-feeding operations in the Bahamas, in some cases safety was less than assured. Spearing live fish on site sent the sharks into a frenzy, whereas dead bait left them circling round in a relaxed manner.

I've noted that many of the suspect operations have changed their methods now or are no longer in business.

Sharks are not the undiscerning predators depicted by the media. Stuart Cove will tell you that he uses different types of bait for attracting different species of shark.

For instance, Caribbean reef sharks love grouper heads, while great hammerheads look for sting rays in the sand. In the absence of any sting-ray cleanings being available, the shark-diver will use barracuda parts. For an expedition to photograph oceanic whitetips, I saw Stuart buy 225kg of bonito, and so on.

We also hear that shark-feeding

Above: Hammerhead shark.

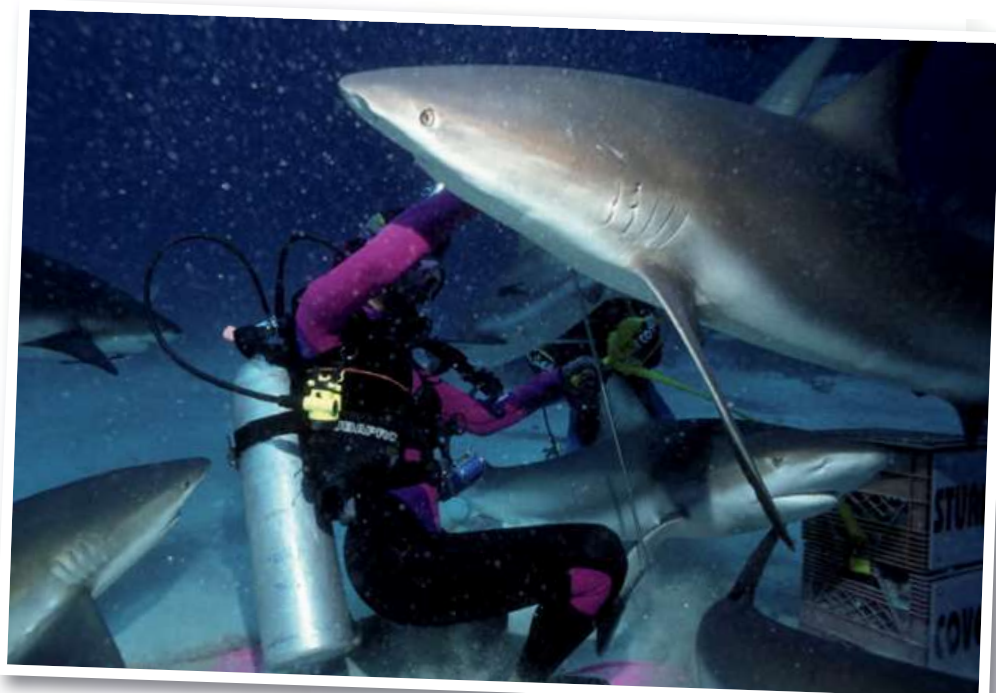
encourages sharks to associate humans with food, yet there are no facts to back this up. There are still far more shark attacks off the coast of Florida, where shark-feeding has been banned for years, than almost anywhere else in the world.

David Diley, a British diver who gave up his career to specialise in shark-awareness films, told me: "Between 2001 and 2012, Florida recorded the most attacks with 257, with Hawaii and Brazil not far behind with 57 and 24 respectively. Feeding is banned in each location, or at least there are no recognised feeds.

"In the same period, Fiji recorded only 11 attacks, and the Bahamas, where feeding is a major industry, had just nine.

"The feeding discussion has been done to death, but rarely in a public medium by people qualified to discuss it with any real credibility. By that I mean behaviourists, researchers studying the effects on location-specific individual sharks, dive operators and science-based local conservation groups in areas where

Below: Michelle Cove feeding.



feeding provides economic and/or ecological benefit. Feeding sharks has been happening since the first time man went to sea, and when done with correct protocols, it's perfectly acceptable and causes no harm whatsoever.

"That said, not all shark feeds are run responsibly, and not all shark feeds use proper protocols designed to ensure their well-being. Also, shark-feed protocols are species-specific and location-specific; some dives are riskier than others.

"The arguments for and against feeding seemingly centre on people speaking on behalf of sharks. Unfortunately, most of those people don't understand how sharks work, their behaviour or the influence of the locations, and so the arguments rely on hearsay, rumour, misunderstanding and misinformation on both sides."

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER Pete Atkinson, now Thailand-based, offered this: "Sharks desperately need economic value with their fins still on, and shark feeds are one way to do this. Because it gives the sharks value, that value can be turned into dollars, for example, for Fijian villages. Without shark-feeding dives, they have far more value as fins.

"As a secondary benefit, feeds create thousands of ambassadors for sharks. And these ambassadors have helped push through protection for endangered species that might otherwise have failed."

Mike Neumann, the Swiss owner of Beqa Adventure Divers in Fiji, confirms that he is against the "shark-huggers, those people who say that sharks are harmless and need our affection."

I think we can all agree with him that sharks generally have a mouth full of sharp teeth, and if you want to get

close to them, you should be aware of that.

Liz Parkinson, a senior shark-feeder with Stuart Cove's operation who likes to freedive with sharks, makes the distinction that different species have different feeding patterns. She had this to say: "In the Bahamas, we are fortunate to dive with several different shark species. It was only when I began working with them that I learnt how much their behavioural patterns differ.

"Taking photographs and videos of sharks gives a photographer the fantastic opportunity to get a closer look at these amazing animals. Depending on the species, different feeding methods are used to draw the sharks in.

"We use the sharks' natural food source in all cases, be it live or dead bait, to attract the sharks to us. You have to feed sharks to get the close action shots photographers desire for education and publishing purposes.

"There is definitely a difference between a shark that is being drawn in by bait and a shark swimming up to a person of its own accord. Either way, it is an experience you will never forget!"

A final word from Charlotte Faulkner, another young English shark-feeder presently working for Stuart Cove: "Seeing shark dives daily, and

a variety of species first-hand, I know the massive difference they make to educate people about shark behaviour and conservation issues.

"They are not completely safe, but I am proud to say that no spectator has ever been injured here.

"All participants sign a statement of risk. Feeders get bitten and expect to be so, but they are the people who are most passionate about sharks and won't even register the injury as a shark-bite. The importance of re-educating the brain-washed public about the nature of sharks is of such importance for the future.

"There have been many studies that show that feeding does not significantly



Above: Graham Cove

John Bantin discusses shark-feeding at DIVE 2015 at the NEC – see Show Planner

affect the spatial pattern or sexual segregation of some shark species. The more we can narrow the gap between humans and sharks, the more chance we have to stop sharks being wiped out in our lifetime."

Shark Bytes: Tales of Diving with the Bizarre and the Beautiful

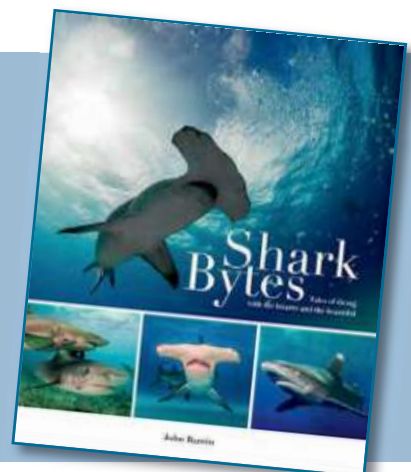
by John Bantin

In his latest book, the diving veteran and former **DIVER** chief correspondent recounts many tales of his adventures with sharks over the past four decades, accompanied by his own spectacular photography.

The animals, ranging from blacktips to whale sharks, were encountered in locations all over the world.

Fernhurst Books, ISBN: 9781909911451

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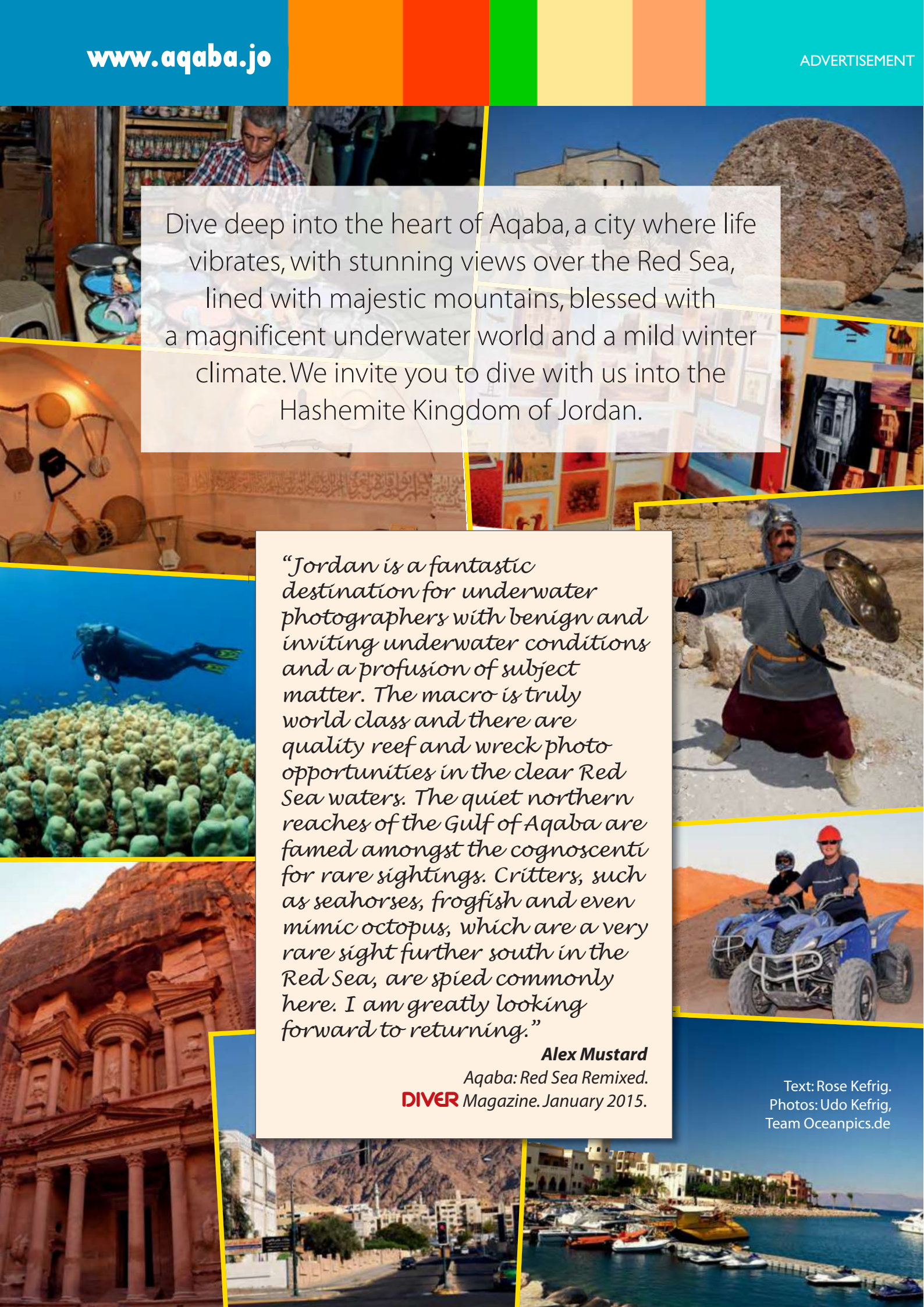
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Alex Mustard

Aqaba: Red Sea Remixed.

DIVER Magazine. January 2015.

Text: Rose Kefrig.
Photos: Udo Kefrig,
Team Oceanpics.de

Aqaba – Jordan

The founder and Manager of the Red Sea Dive Centre, Mohammed Al-Momany, and his guest Udo Kefrig drive up to the beach and park the battered old minibus directly on the golden sand. Within a few minutes they have changed into their dive gear and are ready to have a blast!

Although tourism is still in its infancy, divers are keen to explore the riches the underwater world of Jordan has to offer. It is only a 200m dive from the beach to the photogenic wreck of the *Cedar Pride*, and Aqaba's most photographed shipwreck has a story to tell.

On the 4th of August 1982, according to a witness, the fire had started unexpectedly, probably caused by a faulty gas connection in the galley, from which thick black smoke started to pour. The fire quickly spread to other areas of the ship, until it reached the engine-room.

Flames shot into the air, and in no time at all the fire had reached the bridge. Hungry flames started to lick their way from deep within the ship's belly, swallowing everything with which they came into contact, and developing rapidly. Sadly, two crewmen lost their lives during the devastation.

A three-year argument ensued. Nobody wanted to take responsibility for what should happen to the burnt-out ship – until, that is, the King of Jordan, Abdullah II, stepped in to decide her fate.

As a keen diver, the King suggested that the *Cedar Pride* should be sunk close to shore, in shallow water. He said it would be a good idea to add another attraction and to introduce an artificial reef for marine life to the area.

In close co-operation with the Jordanian Navy a suitable resting place was found. The wreck became a dive-site blessed year-round with good visibility, light wind and currents, and in depth between 9 and 30m.

Resting on her port side, with the bow facing north, the wreck offered a colourful display of coral and a home to many fish. After the dive, Mohammed says farewell with the words: "Never remove anything from the sea, apart from food for the body, comfort for your heart and inspiration for the soul." That dive was back in 1995.



Lifestyle and culture in Aqaba

Nearly 20 years later, Udo is back and I am with him in the Kingdom of Jordan. It is my first visit to Aqaba and times have changed. Tourism has outgrown its infancy. Sun-worshippers, families and divers, those who wish to combine culture and water sports, have found in Jordan the perfect destination.

Located on the Red Sea coast, with a water temperature of around 20°C in winter and 27°C during summer, the destination has everything that causes a diver's heart to beat a little faster: suitable accommodation, quad-biking through the desert, top dive centres, fantastic beaches, and a fascinating, intact underwater world.

From low-budget to five-star resorts, the duty-free 120,000-inhabitant metropolis is tailored to the visitor. Aqaba offers modern restaurants, fast-food chains and brand shops with souvenirs and handicrafts.

Unique gifts to take home are the local sand-art bottles. Watch how grains of dyed sand are carefully sorted by both colour and size, and then placed into





bottles of different sizes and types. Using specially devised tools, the artists meticulously construct detailed images of landscapes, wildlife or even your name into small works of art.

Browse and shop for stunning, individual pieces of hand-crafted jewellery. You don't want to miss a visit to the local bakeries. Who could walk past the shelves of delicious, freshly baked bread, cakes and baklava?



At the market, the tantalizing smells of freshly ground coffee, cinnamon, cumin and coriander, just to name a few, hang in the warm air. The market-sellers are not intrusive and will offer a friendly "Thank you and welcome to our beautiful city" even if you don't take up their offer of a cup of tea, and simply walk by.

At night the town turns into a blaze of light and is full of people and activity. To be on a camel's back is part of a holiday experience, but sitting on a sightseeing bus is a wonderful way to explore the beauty of the city.

The red buses can be found in the parking lot opposite the tourist information office. Two routes are offered. The first covers the city centre only and the second route will take you through the centre and the South Beach. So sit back and relax while you take in some of Aqaba's most popular attractions with that

special someone, friends or family.

From a nearby tavern, a spicy-sweet smell assaults our senses. A group of casually dressed young men lounge on chairs around a three-foot shisha pipe. Other men watch football or play dominoes. In a corner several girls sit and compare the latest phones. It's a great mix of locals and tourists.

The options for great dining may far exceed the time you have in Aqaba – making a return visit a must. Be sure to try out sayyadeyeh, a local dish made of a combination of rice, fish and oriental flavourful spices.

Aqaba is a tolerant town, in a strategically favourable location, and there is a permanent coming and going. Since it was built nearly 5000 years ago, the city has had an important economic role and is a departure point for sea travel to Africa, Europe and Asia.



Up-and-coming

Nancy Tayyan and Abed Abu Alizz from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) are going to be our local travel companions during the trip. The Authority was started in 2001 and it is an important hub for culture, tourism and environmental issues.

Our itinerary starts from the Royal Yacht Club – a romantic “sunset cruise” managed by the Sindbad Group is a perfect way to see the Gulf of Aqaba. We sit back to take in the serene beauty as the sun disappears behind the mountains.



Aqaba is an exciting city. “The Aqaba Special Economic Zone is a major duty-free economic development node for tourism, recreational services, professional services, multi-modal transportation, and value-added industries in the Middle East,” Nancy tells us. “A simplified business environment has been designed with streamlined administrative systems to attract investment and maximise private-sector participation in all aspects of the Zone operations and development.

“We sincerely hope that more divers and families will come to explore what beautiful Aqaba has to offer.”

Modern Aqaba has not covered all traces of its rich history, however. The Mamluk Fort, better known as the Aqaba Castle, looks back on an eventful past. Not far away is the museum, which provides an insight into the city's past as a trading centre.

There, a precious exhibit is the Via Nova Traina milestone, which carries an inscription stating that the Emperor Trajan built and opened the trading road that leads from Syria to the Red Sea.

Another pleasure is to relax and unwind in one of



the local spas. The Bab Al Hara is excellent for couples, whereas the La Moda Centre is for women only – and is not for the faint-hearted! After a steam and thorough salt scrub, which eradicates every dead and living skin cell, a result even a doctorfish couldn't achieve, you will leave the salon visibly smoother, in line with the claim of “Botox without a needle.”



Another great place to chill and unwind is the Berenice Beach Club, where excellent international and local cuisine is served until late.

The Observatory

Have you ever wondered where the birds travel to in winter? The answer is the Aqaba Bird Observatory.

Migratory birds in the southern hemisphere use the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway to return to Europe and the northern hemisphere in the spring. On their journey, more than 1.5 million birds stop over in places like the Jordan Valley to rest and drink water before they continue their travels.

Established in 2004, the 500,000 square metre observatory serves as a station for birdwatchers from around the world. We are shown around the Observatory and given lots of information which any bird-lover will find interesting. According to its Manager

Feras Rahahleh, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority gave Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature the authority to manage this beautiful area.

Something for everybody

Whether you are single, with a group or with your family, Jordan's dive resorts and hotels have something to suit every situation and budget. If you wish to be entertained, pampered, wined and dined, many five-star resorts are available. Most dive centres located on the South Beach offer excellent hotel accommodation, and with such a wide variety of dive and snorkelling sites this is a place that suits everyone, from first-timers to experienced technical enthusiasts.



All the sites are only a short drive from the town centre and 25 minutes from the international King Hussein Airport.

Also located on the South Beach is an area of local diving villages, including Sea Star Watersports, International Arab Divers Village, Aqaba Adventure Divers Village, Bedouin Moon Village, Bedouin Garden Village, Nemo Dive Centre, Al-Marsa and Darna Village Camp. Built by divers for divers, this area is a mixture of historic and Arab design between the beach and the mountains, with taxis and shuttle buses available to ferry guests into town.

Extra Divers Aqaba is located on the beach, and entry into the Red Sea is a comfortable, short stroll into clear, calm swimming-pool-like water.

Soft and hard corals have taken hold on the rusty structure of the Pier, which is a perfect site for children and beginners. If you carry on diving, you reach the Magic Block, where fish-life explodes.

Before you know it, 70 minutes have passed as you try to take in all the different species of marine life. You



can find everything from moray eels, seahorses and lionfish to frogfish, and the memory card on your camera will soon be full.

Not far away, perfectly situated at the Berenice Beach Club, is the Sindbad Dive Club. This centre belongs to the five-star dive resort of the Sindbad Group, offers every comfort and a special ambience and is run under the professional guidance of Khaled Kenawy.

First-class diving

It is our pleasure to dive with Khaled on the wreck of the *Cedar Pride*. What a treat! A lot has changed in 20 years and she does her name proud. She lies on her port side and is richly covered in soft and hard coral, but the "crow's-nest" is the best part. Red corals hang like fat grapes, and if you look a little closer you find plenty of macro-life among the fine display of coral.

With more than 20 dive sites, nearly 500 fish species, 127 types of stone coral and 300 different types of soft coral counted by scientists in the Gulf of Aqaba, there is plenty to see. With such first-class diving available, the Jordanian dive centres located at the South Beach have a lot to offer.

Aqaba's Anchor Diving Centre will make your stay





more than memorable. It is impossible to name every local hotel and dive centre, but most have their own little, family-friendly resort with free child-minding while you enjoy your dive. All have attractive package deals on diving and accommodation and can arrange excursions to Wadi Rum, Petra and other attractions. It is worth checking them out before booking.

At the other end of the price scale most of the five-star hotels have their own dive centre within the resort. Remember the Red Sea Dive Centre? It is still there. The same bus that Udo and Mohammed used to drive to the dive site nearly 20 years ago is waiting for divers, though today it is his son Abdullah who greets us warmly.

A few hundred metres further on is Aqaba Adventure Divers, with its own hotel and shuttle service to town and access to all the dive sites.

Perfect location

Those hoping to get an “adrenaline kick” by coming face-to-face with a shark or manta ray will be disappointed. Due to low current conditions, not enough food is available for them to survive.

Aqaba is an excellent dive location for beginners, families and those wishing to continue their dive training. Underwater photographers especially will enjoy the calm conditions.

To preserve a healthy marine life and keep the beaches clean ASEZA has formed a national team called the Aqaba Dive Clean Up National Team. Thelma Redwan runs the initiative, supported by the members of the Aqaba Dive Centres, the Aqaba Marine Park, Aqaba Science Station, Royal Jordanian Navy, and the Royal Marine Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS).

In collaboration with the Aqaba Marine Park and the support of the local dive centres they are committed to keeping the dive sites and natural environment clean

and healthy. As Abed Abu Alizz from ASEZA explains, “it is an ongoing mission to enlighten young and old to keep our beaches and sea clean. This is why we continuously visit schools to educate the younger generation to support the environmental protection efforts.”

We too, are invited to visit the Marine Science Station. It is not open to the public and therefore is a privilege to dive with the marine scientist Tareq Al-Salman. Closely we watch as he measures how the sea-grass grows, inspects the coral, and finds new species of fish in this protected zone.

The area has huge table corals which have painstakingly been transported from other areas in Aqaba.

Wadi Rum

A favourite excursion leads along the Desert Highway toward Wadi Rum. You can see the tracks of the legendary Hejaz-Train, lots of fruit cultivation and banana plantations. In between are the pitched, black tents of the Bedouins.

Finally, as the road bends, we get the first glimpse of Wadi Rum and the giant, magnificent Seven Pillars of Wisdom come into view. When you plan this tour, you must consider spending a night or two in a Bedouin camp especially for visitors. It is a highlight for everyone to spend time in the desert, enjoy traditional food and relax by the campfire, explore the desert on a camel’s back and, finally, to watch the stars under the crystal-clear sky. Even kids will enjoy this exciting adventure.



It doesn't matter if you explore the desert on one of the Jeep tours offered or, more authentically but not the most comfortable option, on the back of a camel. One thing is certain: once you have witnessed the solitude and mystical calmness of the desert you will not forget it, and will be drawn back to this tranquil place.

On leaving, you will have to change your fantasy mode into reality mode – not an easy task. You will finally understand why the desert has been described as "clean". It is also spacious, desolate and mysterious.

Romantic Petra

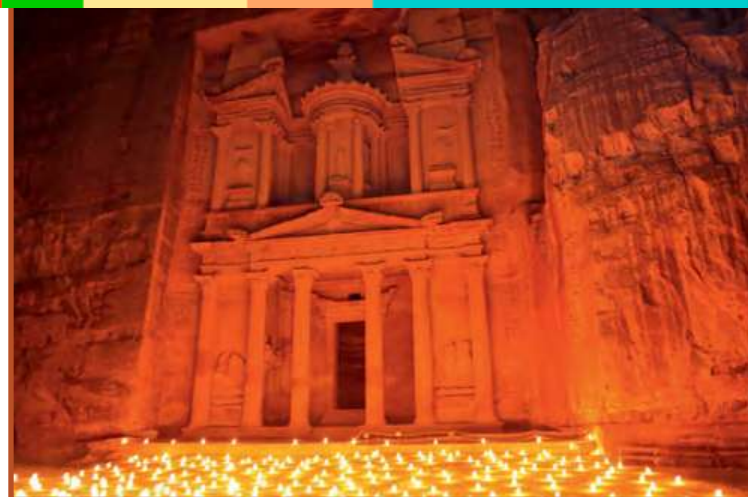
Nearly everyone has heard of the Nabatean city of Petra, which UNESCO declared a World Heritage Site. This city of ornate rock is often regarded as the seventh wonder of the world, and lies in the heart of the Shara Mountains. It played a vital role as part of the major trading route connecting ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.

With its bizarre rock formation and ever-changing colour, Petra remains a place of magic. At night, it is ablaze with a thousand candles and forms a romantic setting. Visitors are encouraged to visit Siq Al-Barid, or Little Petra as it is more commonly known. The entry fee is already included in the price. Interesting features include a temple, the Painted House and Roman cisterns.



During your excursion, and if time allows, a short visit to Al-Shobak Castle should be included. The Jordan Heritage Revival Company invites you to an adventurous voyage into the past with real live events, tales and games.

Located opposite the castle is the Montreal Hotel, a quiet and serene place. Here, we meet Mr Ameen, who invites us to his village Al Mqaria. He shows us "mud huts" that belonged to his family and have become something of a tourist attraction.



We have been shown a lot of kindness, and the warm hospitality is now extended once more. We are invited to a traditional lunch at Mr Ameen's home and offered herb tea and the national dish, called "mansaf", a delicious, rich mix of rice, mutton, pine-nuts and almonds, covered in a tangy yoghurt sauce.

The meal is traditionally eaten without knife and fork, and every now and then big chunks of roasted lamb meat are pushed in front of us. It is a reflection of the generosity and hospitality of the locals honouring their guests.

The village lies high in the mountain, and the view over Abu Skakeen and the King's Highway, a long, old trade road, is spectacular.

The range of historical monuments is endless and the tour leads us on to Wadi Mujib. The nature reserve offers spectacular scenery of a breath-taking gorge and waterfalls and is rich in wildlife.

Finally, we stop in Madaba, a quirky, lively town, and have lunch at a fantastic restaurant called Haret Jdoudna. Don't miss the chance to try out its special dishes.

From Mount Nebo, where Moses looked down upon the Promised Land, right up to the Dead Sea, where we stop at the Mövenpick Hotel, relax, and review the past 14 days, it's been an exciting itinerary. We are happy to tell everyone that a stay in Aqaba offers not only an adventure for divers, but a trip of a lifetime for the whole family.

Nancy and Abed from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority have been perfect hosts. Jordan is a welcoming country, with hospitable people and great diving. It is an unforgettable trip to the "oasis and beyond"!



Factfile Aqaba – Jordan

Four states lie close to the big 100,000 square kilometre land of Jordan. Over thousands of years, the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Persians, Jews, Romans, Greeks, Muslims, Crusaders and British have all left traces of their colonialism. Across the country tourists interested in culture will stumble upon relics from different periods on this timeline.

Nevertheless, Jordan is not only a place of nature reserves, history, desert, temples and historical ruins. Aqaba is known as an international seaport with links to the rest of the world. With its hotels it is an emerging tourist attraction for the family and the discerning traveller to the Red Sea.

Everything appears planned out in Aqaba, and it is cleaner than other parts of the country.

Accommodation

Aqaba has a wide choice of accommodation, from the five-star resort with dive centre through apartments to the more basic campsite. The choice is yours and there is something for every wallet.

If you prefer life in the city, exclusive hotels are on offer. A few kilometres outside the city are the quieter and low-key as well as the larger, all-inclusive resorts, each with their own charming ambience.

The local dive centres with hotel offer comfortable, family-friendly accommodation and child-care. This is an excellent choice for the diver with family seeking peace and seclusion. A regular shuttle-bus service is on constant offer and the taxis are very reasonable.



Where to meet and eat



The city pulsates with life and the lights shine more brightly. The evenings provide a wondrous mix of cultures. Everybody meets anybody and over black, sweet coffee past events are discussed or next day's planned.

The souks are a perfect amalgam of colour, energy and vibrancy. There is nothing that isn't sold here – you'll find perfumes, spices, bags, clothes, baskets, shawls, carpets, shoes, jewellery and many other fine crafts.

The cuisine is a wonderful mix of herbs and spices and the restaurants, bistros and cafes are a culinary delight.

How to get there

There are flights with Turkish Airlines to Aqaba 4 times a week from all major UK airports. It is also possible to travel to Aqaba via ferry from Taba and Nuweiba.



When to visit

Jordan is a year-round destination but ideal times are March-October.

Entry requirements

British citizens need a valid passport with at least six months left before expiry. A visa will be issued at the Queen Alia International and King Hussein International Airports. Children must be in possession of a valid passport with photo.

Currency

Dinar (£1 = 1.11 JD)

Overview

Aqaba is the ideal place for a combined holiday for divers, non-divers and the whole family. With its laid-back atmosphere, culture, rich history, duty-free shopping and diving, the city of Aqaba is a must on any holiday list. It is a perfect base from where to visit Petra, Wadi Rum, the Dead Sea, the Bird Observatory, nature reserves and much more.

Diving *in* Aqaba – Jordan

Apart from the impressive inland excursions, Aqaba offers a wide spectrum of water-sport activities for the whole family. The dive sites, apart from the *Cedar Pride*, cannot be compared with those of the southern part of the Red Sea, but with more than 20 dive sites from which to choose, the pleasure is more in detail.

The scope for macro photography is enormous, and the charm of intact hard corals, good visibility and calm waters make this a paradise for underwater photographers, families and beginners, but more challenging dive sites are available for those who want them.

Water temperatures range from 20°C in winter to 27°C in summer. During winter a 7mm suit with hood is recommended, but during summer a shortie or a 3mm wetsuit will suffice.

Aqaba's top five dive sites

1. *Cedar Pride*

Depth: 8-30 metres



One of the most famous dive sites in Aqaba, the *Cedar Pride* is a must in your logbook. The Lebanese freighter was sunk in 1985 and counts as one of the best wreck dives in the Red Sea. The mast with its "crow's-nest" is the highlight for photographers and divers. The site is populated by large groupers, scorpionfish and millions of glassfish.

2. Japanese Garden

Depth: 0-30 metres

This beautiful place certainly lives up to its name. Let's start with a funny artificial reef made of chairs, benches, tables and a coat-stand. The reef then becomes an

incredible coral garden. This location is suitable for either a shallow or a deep dive. The reef is a habitat for a huge number of different small fish, and seeing torpedo rays is a regular occurrence. The dive ends over a sandy bottom with a lot of garden eels.

3. Power Station

Depth 2-40 metres

The only accessible steep slope for divers in Aqaba offers fantastic stone and hard corals in every colour and shape. This dive site is north of the Aqaba Marine Park, near the harbour. It is not unusual to see turtles, moray eels or octopus there. The shallow part between 2 and 18 metres offers unique coral scenery and all sorts of critters can be spotted under close inspection.

4. Seven Sisters/ Tank

Depth: 0-18 metres

The *Cedar Pride* is not the only wreck; another dive location is the American M42 Duster tank, which was turned into an artificial reef in 1999. At only

5 metres it is suitable for beginners and snorkellers. But that is not all this dive site has to offer. Seven large coral blocks found at a depth of 10m are aptly named the Seven Sisters. An abundance of biodiversity is in evidence, in particular stone corals such as brain- and salad-leaf coral, and the sponges are eye-catchers. Take your time and observe the marine life.



5. Gorgone I

Depth: 0-25 metres

The site is named after the wonderful, large gorgonian fan coral at a depth of 16 metres, although black coral is also found there. It is an excellent shallow dive. Lionfish abound, and if you take your time and look in all the crevices you will find moray eels too. It is not uncommon to come across turtles, parrotfish and even eagle rays – this is an enchanting place and a true delight for photographers.

Dive Centres *in* Aqaba – Jordan

For divers, Aqaba is a paradise, with more than 20 dive centres.

The local dive schools are mainly under the guidelines of PADI or are accredited by BSAC and CMAS, whereas Sinai Divers and Extra Divers are also associated with SSI, International Aquanautic Club (IAC) and CMAS.

This is a perfect place to continue your diver training to all levels.

Divers who have started with PADI, BSAC, CMAS or other qualifications can finish their courses in Aqaba. Learning material are available and staff are qualified to all levels. Dive sites are reached by boat or from the beach. Full equipment rental is possible and 12 litre aluminium tanks (DIN and A-clamp) and nitrox are available.



Extra Divers

aqaba@extradivers.info
www.extradivers.info

Sinai Divers

Contact: Karim B. Farid & Rolf Schmidt
aqaba@sinaidivers.com
www.sinaidivers.com

Sindbad Dive Club

Contact: Khaled M. Kenawy
divingmanager@sindbadjo.com
www.sindbadjo.com

Red Sea Dive Centre

Contact: Abdulla Al Momani
info@aqabascubadiving.com
www.qabascubadiving.com

Aqaba Adventure Divers Village

Contact: Raid N. Abu Mahfouz
info@aqaba-diving.com
www.aqaba-diving.com

Almarsa Village Resort

Contact: Hamad Suleiman
hamad@almarsa-aqaba.com
www.almarsa-aqaba.com

Jordan Frog Man

Contact: Mansour Al Shamaileh
jfrogman@orange.jo
www.mrfrogman.com

Sea Star Watersports

Contact: William Sawalha
aboveandbelow@orange.jo
www.aqabadivingseastar.com

International Arab Divers Village

Contact: Moad Al Ma'aitah
info@aqaba-divevillage.com
www.aqaba-divevillage.com

Royal Diving Club

Contact: Mousa Abu Haweleh
info@coralbay.jo
www.rdc.jo

Barracuda Diving Club

Contact: Ahmad Katawneh
barracuda.aqaba@gmail.com
www.goaqabadive.com

Bedouin Moon Village

Contact: Mohammad Abu Ghreiganeh
mohammedsea@lycos.com
www.bedouinmoonvillage.com

Bedouin Garden Village

Contact: Mousa al Ryati
mousasea@yahoo.com
www.aqaba-hotels.com

Nemo Dive Center

info@nemo-dive-aqaba.com
www.nemo-dive-aqaba.com

Aqaba's Anchor Diving

Contact: Stephanie
aqabasanchor@outlook.com
www.aqabasanchor.com

Aqaba International Dive Center

Contact: Abu Mahfouz
www.aqabadivingcenter.com

Dive Aqaba

Contact: Amjad AL Sulabi
diveaqaba@diveaqaba.com
www.diveaqaba.com

Aqaba Sharks Bay Divers

Contact: Talal Abu Mahfouz
info@aqaba-sharksbay.com
www.aqaba-sharksbay.com

Ahlan Aqaba

Contact: Shadi Mohammad Ali
info@diveinaqaba.com
www.diveinaqaba.com

Darna Village Camp

Contact: Abed Alhadi Ryati
darnadiver@gmail.com
www.darnavillage.com

Jordan Star Diving Center

Contact: Nabil Al-Aqrabawi
scubadiverjo@yahoo.com
www.jordandivingcenter.com

Hyperbaric chamber

Large and state-of-the-art, the multi-place Haux-Starmed 2200 Hyperbaric Chamber is situated at the Prince Hashem bin Abdullah II Hospital in Aqaba.

Dr Fawzi Mohammed Khawaldeh is available to treat not only divers with decompression illness, but people with other medical problems.



Hotels *in* Aqaba – Jordan



**Mövenpick Resort & Residences
Aqaba**

www.moevenpick-aqaba.com

**Mövenpick Resort & Residences
Tala Bay**

www.moevenpick-aqaba.com

Intercontinental Aqaba

www.intercontinental.com

Radisson BLU

www.radissonblu.com

Kempinski Hotel

www.kempinski-aqaba.com

DoubleTree by Hilton Aqaba

www.doubletree.com

Oryx Hotel

www.oryx-hotel.com



Aqaba Gulf

www.aqabagulf.com

Marina Plaza

www.marinaplaza.org

Days Inn

www.daysinn-aqaba.com



Captain Hotel

www.captains.jo

Coral Bay Hotel

www.rdc.jo

Crystal Int. Hotel

crystalhotelaqaba@yahoo.com



Al-Cazar

www.alcazarhotel.com

Classic Hotel

classicreservation@gmail.com

Shweiki Int. Hotel

shweiki_hotel@yahoo.com

Al-Shula

alshulahotel@yahoo.com

Al-Dweik II

atalla_dweik@yahoo.com

Al Zaitoneh

zaitounahotel@yahoo.com

Nairoukh II

menairoukh@hotmail.com

Jardaneh

www.jardaneh-apartments.com

Cedar

cedar_hotel@yahoo.com

Rae'd Hotel Suites

info@raedhotel.com



Golden Rose

www.goldenroseaqaba.com

Safa

safadw@yahoo.com

Under classification

Yafko hotel

www.yafko.com

Golden Tulip

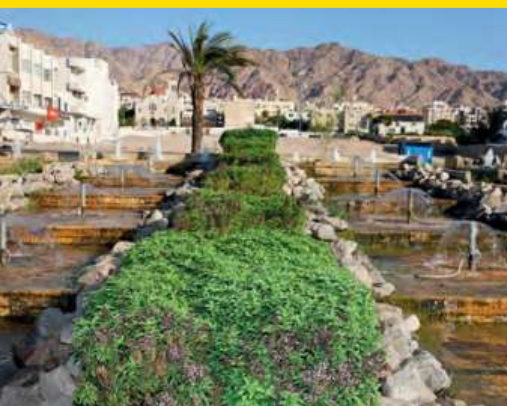
www.goldentulipaqaba.com

Mina Hotel

www.minahotelaqaba.com

My Hotel

www.myhotel-jordan.com



Further information

Aqaba Tourist Information Centre

Marketing & Tourism Directorate

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA)

Tel: +962 (0)3 2091000/Ext 2477

+962 (0)3 2035360

Fax: +962 (0)3 2091052

Email: info@aqaba.jo

www.aqaba.jo

The Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority

www.aqabazone.com

Jordan Tourism Board

www.visitjordan.com



Insiders' Seychelles

Underwater Guide to Seychelles

by Christophe Mason-Parker & Rowana Walton

THIS NEW REFERENCE

BOOK is for divers visiting what I always want to call the Seychelles but which the authors just call Seychelles, so that's what I'll be calling it in future – you see, I've learnt something already.

It comes hot on the heels of last year's guide by Oliver, Robin and Justin Gerlach, which covered similar ground but used illustrations rather than photographs.

The more substantial *Underwater Guide to Seychelles* is divided into three parts – an overview of the Indian Ocean islands and the marine environment, including practical information for travellers; a guide to 25 popular dive and 10 snorkelling sites; and a marine-life ID section covering 280 common Indian Ocean fish, invertebrates and corals.

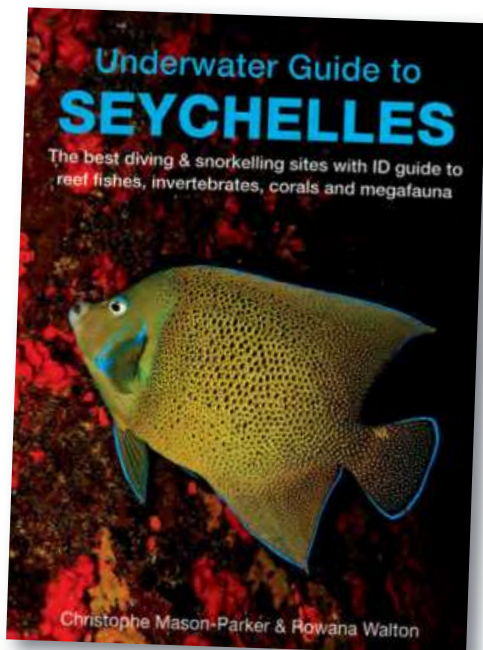
The dive-site guide concentrates on sites around the main island of Mahe but also includes Silhouette and North Island, and Praslin and surrounding islands. Two wreck-sites are included, the *Aldabaran* and Twin Barges.

The writers are Seychelles residents who clearly know their subject very well. Christophe Mason-Parker is a conservationist and photographer and runs the local gap-year volunteer programme Global Vision International Seychelles, while scientific diver Rowana Walton works for conservation organisation Seychelles Islands Foundation.

They have done a very nice job of assembling the information into a neat and readable package.

The only downside is that the book seems to have been slightly let down at the production stage. The original photography appears fine, even though most pictures have had to be used rather small (single-column whale sharks?). However, what appears to be a lack of colour-correction has left an impression of gloom about pages that, considering the subject matter, should be vibrant.

Even the cover choice, of a relatively



drab semi-circle angelfish, undersells the contents, when so many brightly coloured Indian Ocean fish might have sung off the page.

For fish ID I would probably prefer to go with one of the comprehensive Indian Ocean or Maldives books available, with bigger, brighter pictures and more information. But if I was heading for the Seychelles, this guide's overall content would probably put it on my reading list.

Steve Weinman

John Beaufoy Publishing
ISBN: 9781909612532
Softback, 160pp, £14.99

SERIOUSLY COMPETITIVE

Freediving (eBook)
by Simo Kurra, Kimmo Lahtinen & Ari Nissinen

FREEDIVING IS A 160-PAGE

ebook about all aspects of freediving, from the physics and history behind it to the equipment and psychology needed. This is a book for the serious-minded, readers who want to know exactly how and why physiological changes take place and how to take their freediving beyond the realms of casual snorkelling.

In the diving physics chapter you are right into

equations and towards the end of the book you have a suggested training plan to take you to 60m at the next world championships.

The authors have an absolute wealth of knowledge, backed up by the copious amounts of research papers referenced in the appendix. Their experience gives you an accurate and unique window on the world of competitive freediving, how it works, and what it takes to get there.

This will inspire new people to the sport looking for competition and challenge but may put off some people looking for a lighter read.

This would be a missed opportunity, however, as one of the gems of this book is the chapter on psychology. It explores in depth stress, fear, "flow" and the mindset needed to be a successful freediver: "A freediver who is striving to succeed in competition should be a combination of both types of divers (performance and pleasure orientated), possessing the right mixture of maturity and ambition".

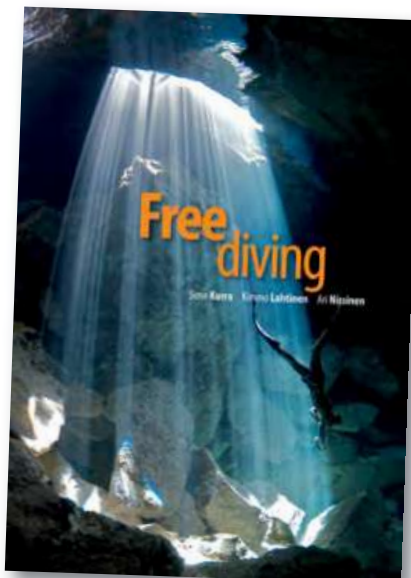
Furthermore, the chapter ends with a statement regarding black-outs: "as a recurring event, they are a clear sign of an unhealthy diving culture".

In the chapter on nutrition, I would have liked to see more about foods that can hinder equalisation and how to reduce inflammation in the body, but this is a tiny niggle.

Freediving is a thoroughly researched, thoughtful and considered book that would appeal to anyone interested in freediving – but particularly to someone who is looking to compete.

Emma Farrell

Deep Ideas
ISBN: 9789526833804 (ePub)
eBook (iBooks, Play Books),
158pp, £12.90



BULL SHOT

100 Dive Sketches from the Worlds of Film and Television
by Richard Bull

IT IS WRITTEN THAT no TV or film documentary venture involving underwater sequences should ever be embarked on without the presence of Richard Bull.

He is the go-to guy if you want the unpredictable to turn out smoothly, and seems to have been that guy since (as he puts it in this book not once but twice) Siebe met Gorman.

If you haven't heard of him, check out the underwater supervisor credits next time.

Now Bull has taken 100 of the rough pencil sketches he drew to help brief divers on various underwater projects, added a commentary to each one and made a book out of it.

Bull makes no claim to being an artist, and when I call these rough sketches, I mean rough. You won't buy



this to revel in the artwork, but for the background notes.

So let's get the functional downside out of the way first. As a renowned consultant, perhaps Bull could have taken a little advice himself about laying out a book.

Putting the text into a bold face set justified over the entire width of an A4 page, without paragraphs and against a grey background, doesn't invite the reader to dive in – in fact it had the opposite effect on this one.

The bold type is particularly inappropriate against the spidery stickman sketches, knocking them even further into the background.

OK, reading this book may not be the easiest going, but it's quite fun once you get past that. It's a who's who of leading pro divers and camera-facing celebrities, supervised by Bull on dives many of which I remember

seeing on screen. Sometimes all goes well, but often it doesn't.

The text is informally, not to say haphazardly, written, but there are lots of tasty snippets. Who knew that Alan Titchmarsh was such a natural diver? Find out what Bull thoughtlessly said to astronaut Buzz Aldrin and regretted straight away. Try to figure out which TV presenters this diver who doesn't suffer fools rates highly (I'm guessing Miranda Krestovnikoff, Kate Humble and Paul Rose for starters?).

The briefing sketches are non-technical and easy to follow, as they were intended to be. However home-made this book might be, it does offer an entertaining insight into the life of a man who could be supervising a dive in a Staines pool one week and in Truk Lagoon the next.

And before you get too envious, consider the responsibility he bears on dives that are often hairy and hard to predict, and with marine life that doesn't realise it is supposed to co-operate. As this book shows, if anything is going to go wrong on an underwater shoot, it will.

Richard Bull's job is to use his skill as a visualiser to boost the chances of a safe and positive outcome, and that's what his sketch-book reflects.

Steve Weinman

The Great Artist
Thegreatartiste@outlook.com
 Softback, 112pp, £12

WORLD VIEW

A History of the World in 16 Shipwrecks
 by Stewart Gordon

AT FIRST GLANCE THE SUBJECT

of this book would appear to be pretentious. A world history, encapsulating universal human experience by analysing the processes of exploration, trade, culture, maritime development and warfare in a mere 16 wrecks, seems adventurous, to say the least.

But in the examples that Stewart

Gordon takes, he shows how both the existence as well as the reason for and drama of the wreck enlarges our understanding of human existence, its development and process.

In doing so, he deflects the short-sighted view of particular wrecks – the current newsworthiness of treasure, battles and the foraging for fresh trade routes.

From the early beginnings of man's journey on water with a 6000 BC dugout canoe (the *Dafuna*) to the tourist cruise disaster of the *Costa Concordia* in 2012, the author illustrates his theme with well-researched and highly readable accounts.

He is almost up to date with the current accounts (and controversy) of one of today's hot-potato wreck sites, HMS *Victory*, which may soon be seen as an avoidable loss, and cultural victim of poor regulation and politics.

When it comes to the Spanish galleon *Los Tres Reyes* (1634), Gordon has the wreck illustrate several aspects, including silver and the Spanish trading world, and the construction, arming and manning of a warship carrying trading goods in the 17th century.

Of course there are gaps – Gordon hardly touches on the immense

impact of the expansion to the East in the many and diverse wrecks of the East India Companies, for example.

However, his main idea, to examine the context, social and economical place of the shipwreck in history, is well and unusually told, and deserves to be read by current shipwreck explorers.

Rex Cowan

ForeEdge
 ISBN: 9781611685404
 Hardback, 290pp, £22

VINTAGE LARN

The Wrecks of Scilly
 by Richard Larn

IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO SEE popular diving books get a make-over, and find out how the author reckons he can improve on what is already regarded as authoritative.

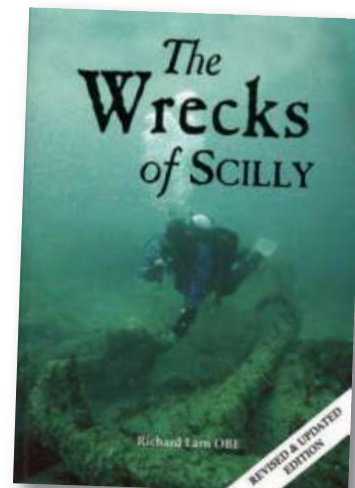
So I was eager to discover what was new and improved in this edition of Richard Larn's book about the diving in his backyard the Scilly Isles, especially as this title dates right back to the early 1990s.

Since its last incarnation in 2010, Larn has been able to source many new ship and especially artefact photographs to include in this seventh edition. These impart a refreshing feel to what is an incredibly easy to read yet detailed history book.

This edition takes full advantage of the discovery of photographs of the bell from HMS *Association*, the 90-gun second-rate ship of the line lost with all hands (around 800 officers and men) after striking Giltstone Reef in 1707. The event was considered the greatest maritime disaster of the age.

The *Association*, part of a squadron of 21 ships returning from the Battle of Toulon, was not the only victim that October evening. HMS *Eagle*, *Romney* and *Firebrand* all struck reefs in the area and sank. Of the 1673 men aboard these vessels, only 26 survivors were reported.

Coming closer to the present day,



the Scilly Isles were headline news again in 1967 when the oil tanker *Torrey Canyon* struck Pollard Rock, leading to one of the worst oil-spills in history – a slick that stretched from France to Alaska and a story that gripped the world for 12 days.

These are two of the many stories that make Larn's book such an interesting read, and the clear, detailed maps preceding each chapter help readers to get and keep their bearings throughout.

Importantly the wrecks indexed have been boosted by 14%, from 980 to around 1120. Additional deepwater World War wrecks in particular will be of interest to technical divers.

The blurb promises pictures "both above and underwater", so my only slight disappointment was in the paucity of underwater photographs, especially considering that more than 900 wrecks are mentioned in the book.

If you're looking for a practical diving guide for Scilly Isles wrecks, this book is no more such a thing than it ever was. But if you want to read and savour the full background of wrecks you hope to dive (and also those that only archaeologists ever get to visit), Richard Larn's book has been polished to a fine sheen over the years.

Alex Khachadourian

Shipwreck & Marine
 ISBN: 9780952397199
 Softback, 228pp, £14.99



TOP 10 BEST-SELLING DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (20 August, 2015)

1. *Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die*, by Chris Santella
2. *Reef Fish Identification, Tropical Pacific*, by Gerald Allen, Roger Steene & Paul Humann
3. *The Darkness Below*, by Rod Macdonald
4. *Manual of Freediving: Underwater on a Single Breath*, by Umberto Pelizzari & Stefano Tovaglieri
5. *Dive Atlas of the World: An Illustrated Reference to the Best Sites*, by Jack Jackson
6. *Dive: The World's Best Diving Destinations*, by Lawson Wood
7. *Diver Down: Real-World Scuba Accidents and How to Avoid Them*, by Michael Ange
8. *Ultimate Diving Adventures: 100 Extraordinary Experiences Under Water*, by Len Deeley
9. *Open Water Diver Manual*, by Drew Richardson
10. *Corsica: Diving Guide* by Kurt Amsler

TOP 10 MOST WISHED-FOR DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (20 August, 2015)

1. *Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die*, by Chris Santella
2. *The Silent World*, by Jacques-Yves Cousteau
3. *Manual of Freediving: Underwater on a Single Breath*, by Umberto Pelizzari & Stefano Tovaglieri
4. *Dive: The World's Best Diving Destinations*, by Lawson Wood
5. *Stars Beneath the Sea: The Incredible Story of the Pioneers of the Deep Sea*, by Trevor Norton
6. *Amazing Diving Stories - Incredible Tales from Deep Beneath the Sea*, by John Bantin
7. *Corsica: Diving Guide* by Kurt Amsler
8. *Discover UK Diving: An Introduction & Personal Guide to UK Scuba Diving*, by Will Appleyard
9. *Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die (Kindle)*, by Chris Santella
10. *Scuba Diving (Kindle)*, by Dennis Graver

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Soak up the Atmosphere

With couples and families seeking “an escape to paradise without the hefty price-tag”, as Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts puts it, November sees the opening of a new “value-focused resort” called OBLU, on Helengeli Island on the eastern rim of the Maldives’ North Malé Atoll.

The resort complements Atmosphere Kanifushi Maldives, opened in 2013 and attracting more European visitors from the UK than any other country.

Helengeli’s southern side forms the feeding channel into the atoll, says Atmosphere, resulting in “an abundance of predatory marine life” passing through. This is coupled with an “exotic” house reef, and the island’s waters are also a no-fishing zone.

Destinology offers a seven-night stay at the OBLU by Atmosphere resort from £1499pp with 5% Early Bird discount for departures on 2 December 2015. Covered are all-inclusive accommodation, return Emirates flights from London Gatwick, Manchester and Birmingham and seaplane transfers.

► www.oblu-helengeli.com,
www.destinology.co.uk

NEW IN NEVIS



Multitudes of turtles – hawksbill and even leatherback – are said to be the big attraction for divers off the small Leeward Island of Nevis in the Caribbean, along with “dozens of reefs, wrecks and volcanic vents” off both Nevis and nearby St Kitts.

New property Paradise Nevis comprises seven beachfront thatched two-, three- and four-bedroom villas with pools on Nevis’s west coast. Stays

cost from £535 a night for four adults, including concierge/butler services.

The island’s only dive centre, Scuba Safaris, is a 10-minute drive away. Four days of two-tank dives cost US \$460, including gear rental. PADI Open Water certification for any member of the party can be carried out in the pool and from the beach by your villa for \$550 (\$450 with eLearning)

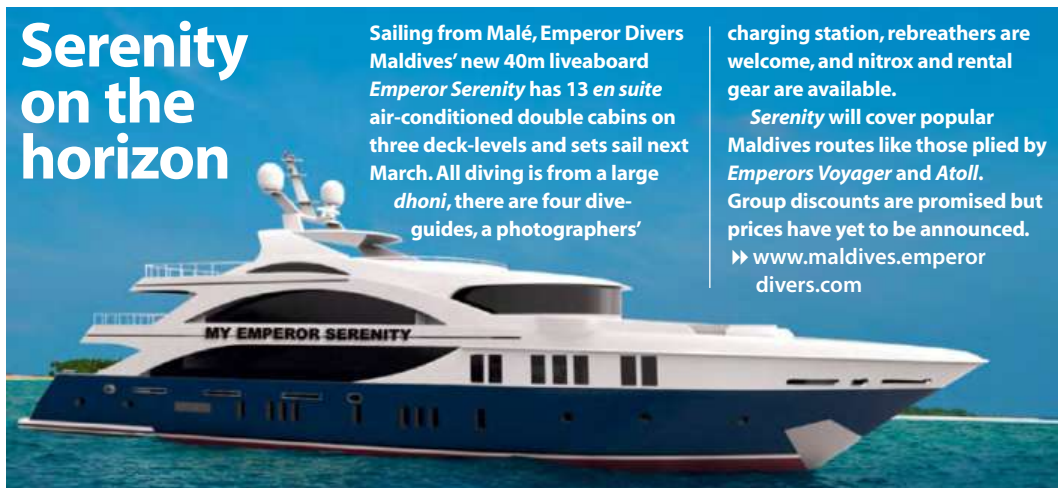
There is also a “Dive & Dine”

package we suspect won’t be to all readers’ tastes. Dive or fish for your own fresh seafood before watching a chef prepare it on your villa patio – a snip at \$1240 for up to four people. And we thought home-caught was a cheap option!

Visitors can fly from the UK to St Kitts, followed by a car and 10-minute water taxi transfer.

► www.paradisebeachnevis.com

Serenity on the horizon



Sailing from Malé, Emperor Divers Maldives’ new 40m liveaboard *Emperor Serenity* has 13 *en suite* air-conditioned double cabins on three deck-levels and sets sail next March. All diving is from a large *dhoni*, there are four dive-guides, a photographers’

charging station, rebreathers are welcome, and nitrox and rental gear are available.

Serenity will cover popular Maldives routes like those plied by *Emperors Voyager* and *Atoll*. Group discounts are promised but prices have yet to be announced.

► www.maldives.emperordivers.com



High-end Maldives

Jumeirah Dhevanafushi is a resort in the southern part of the Maldives, in Gaafu Alifu Atoll with its rich marine life, and it would like to welcome more guests from the UK.

The resort has 35 villas/suites all with pools and 24-hour butler service and, unusually, the water villas are located on a separate island accessible only by boat.

There are three restaurants, spa, bar and, most importantly the PADI 5* Best Dives dive centre.

B&B room rates in high season (to 19 December) for a beach villa are US \$1665 per night (two sharing). A 10-dive pack costs \$710.

► www.jumeirah.com

In Residence

Euro-Divers has flagged up a special offer at the Residence Maldives in Gaafu Alifu Atoll, valid until the year's end - stay at least four nights and you get a restaurant or spa credit of US \$250 per night/room, or \$300 for stays of seven nights or more.

Alternatively an Early Bird Special is available - 44% discount off the best available rate on bookings made at least seven days before arrival.

Usual room rates start from about US \$840 per night.



Meanwhile Euro-Divers has launched a website with new videos, layout and an interface it says is user-friendly whatever the device used.

► www.euro-divers.com

Turtles dig the place

A hundred and twenty-four green turtle eggs laid on Velassaru's beach in the Maldives' South Male Atoll in May hatched in late July - a treat for visitors and staff at the resort, as green turtles usually lay eggs on remote islands.

"It's a very good sign that the turtles feel safe laying their eggs on our beach and we're delighted to see a successful hatching here," said Rudi Palmer, Base Manager of the resort's Immersion Dive Centre.

Velassaru Maldives says it

has now added further protection to existing conservation measures, including securing suitable nesting environments.

The 5* resort, which has 129 villas and bungalows, has a "Getaway" 20% discount on its best available room rates plus complimentary breakfast until 22 December (typical rates from US \$437 per night, two sharing).

► www.velassaru.com



Pure indulgence

Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa in Gaafu Alifu Atoll has a new "Explore and Energise Collection" for divers - spend a day on a series of five dives followed by a 90-minute aromatherapy full-body massage for £400!

► www.maldives.hadahaa.park.hyatt.com

Regal dive site

Regaldiv says its new website is designed to be easier to use and mobile-responsive. Increased social-media integration, enhanced search functions and navigation and a new customer-review system are featured, says the tour operator, and visitors can prepare shortlists to help compare holiday options.

► www.regal-diving.co.uk

Socorro bound

According to Diverse Travel its guests have enjoyed encounters with giant mantas, whale, hammerhead and other sharks, humpback whales and



pod of playful dolphins on its liveaboard trips to Socorro in the eastern Pacific. Now it has added the mv *Valentina* liveaboard to its roster - nine nights with six full days' diving costs from £2325 plus flights.

► www.diversettravel.co.uk

ENTERING SOUTH AFRICA



Ultimate Diving has added to its offerings diving holidays on South Africa's east coast, including noted locations such as Aliwal Shoal and Protea Banks, and embracing annual event the Sardine Run. It says its SA trips can work for beginners and

experienced divers alike, with colourful Indian Ocean reefs and the chance of encounters with sharks, dolphins, whales, turtles and rays.

Seven nights with ScubaAddicts costs from £1499pp for flights from London, transfers, B&B

accommodation and eight dives - with a £50 discount for saying "WeLoveDiving" when you book.

The tour operator has an iPad app listing 50 liveaboards and 120 resorts at 40 destinations,

► www.ultimatediving.co.uk

Red Sea route

For those seeking two-centre Red Sea breaks, airline Egyptair Express has launched new domestic routes between Sharm el Sheikh and Hurghada on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 414 Egyptian pounds plus tax.

► www.express.egyptair.com



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WELL AND TRULY TESTED



A highly evolved regulator leads us off, but NIGEL WADE has also been intrigued by the first waterproof compact camera to shoot RAW – and a capacious pair of shorts!

REGULATOR SCUBAPRO MK25 EVO/A700 BLACK TECH

DIVE-GEAR MAKER SCUBAPRO IS NOT AN

outfit to sit on its laurels when it comes to evolving its products. A case in point is the development of its high-performing and popular MK25 first stage, now featuring coldwater compatibility and partnered with the metal-cased A700 second stage.

Both components have been given a new and sexy black high-gloss finish, adding a cool look and what the maker claims to be rugged durability.

I took a set with me on an intense Red Sea outing to see how it performed.

The First Stage

The MK25 Evo Black Tech first stage has an air-balanced flow-through piston to provide constant and effortless airflow, which the designers say is unaffected by depth, tank pressure or breathing demand.

The first stage on this model is also coldwater-compatible with Scubapro's extended thermal insulating system (XTIS). This fully isolates the mechanical components from the cold, and it's claimed that this increases the regulator's resistance to freezing by up to 30%, compared to a standard MK25 first stage.

The XTIS incorporates an insulated coating on the main spring, insulating bushing on the body, an anti-freeze cap and a bigger body and cap thread.

Externally, the marine-grade brass first stage has supplementary fins machined into its body to provide an extra thermal exchange, enhancing its coldwater-compatibility.

The turret-style body swivels, and has two high-pressure ports fixed either side of the main body and four low-pressure ports on the swivel portion, with an additional fifth lp port at the tip to further streamline hose configurations.

There is also an external intermediate-pressure adjustment for use by service technicians, who won't need to strip down the components to adjust performance.

The latest rendition of the MK25 EVO has external surfaces that have been given a tough black polished Physical Vapour Deposition (PVD) coating. When applied on metal surfaces this increases their hardness, acting as a barrier



Scubapro Mk25 EVO/A700 Black Tech regulator.

to protect the body from the corrosive properties of salt water, and giving it a scratch-resistant finish.

The MK25 EVO Black Tech is available with either 232bar International or 300bar DIN connections.

The Second Stage

The A700 Black Tech second stage has an all-metal, screw-down case and demand-valve housing, again coated with the corrosion- and scratch-resistant PVD. The metal components also act as a heat-exchanger, adding to its coldwater capabilities.

The second stage is fitted with two controls: a diver-adjustable inhalation knob for fine-tuning breathing resistance, and a diver-adjustable Venturi Initiated Vacuum Assist (VIVA) for adding inhalation assistance or freeflow prevention.

The A700 is compact and features Scubapro's air-balanced valve technology for minimal inhalation effort, and a high-flow exhaust valve for ease of exhalation with a compact and narrow exhaust port.

The purge valve is controlled by a centrally positioned button crafted from high-grade polymers and incorporates the maker's logo in chrome. The intermediate hose is a large-bore super-flow version with Kevlar lining, and the mouthpiece is an orthodontic design made from high-quality silicon.

Both the MK25 EVO and A700 Black Tech components meet the latest CE EN250-2014 requirements for coldwater diving and are covered by a limited lifetime warranty.

In Use

I took the regulator combo with me on a week-long trip of intensive diving around Egypt's Ras Mohammed marine park and the Straits of Tiran. This destination wasn't the ideal place to test the regulator's coldwater capabilities but, hey, everyone knows I'm a wuss when it comes to chilly water temperatures!

So I can't comment on this regulator's coldwater prowess, but what I can report is that in the balmy Red Sea the regulator's performance was simply outstanding.

Under water, the initial effort needed to crack the valves when starting the inhalation process was imperceptible, followed by a smooth flow of gas that stopped as soon as the pressure inside the second-stage body increased during exhalation.

This made the breathing process feel less mechanical and as near to natural as I've experienced.

I have found that some high-performing models with which I've dived in the past have seemed as if they were set "right on the edge", giving the disconcerting feeling that they would pass the tipping-point and go into an

SPECS

PRICE ▶ £689

FIRST STAGE ▶ Air-balanced flow-through piston

PORTS ▶ 5lp, 2hp

CONNECTIONS ▶ 300bar DIN, 232bar A-clamp

COLDWATER COMPATIBILITY ▶ Yes, with XTIS

SECOND STAGE ▶ Metal case with

air-balanced valve.

CONTROLS ▶ VIVA. Adjustable inhalation resistance

WEIGHT ▶ Combined stages 1.03kg

(DIN with mp hose)

NITROX ▶ EAN 40%

CONTACT ▶ www.scubapro.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★

uncontrolled freeflow at any second. The MK25/A700 didn't give this impression. Instead, it seemed not even to be there, blending into the background and allowing me to forget that I was breathing from a mechanical valve.

The adjustment controls were very easy to access, and they made a difference too. The VIVA stopped the second stage from discharging huge amounts of gas as I spat it out of my mouth at depth.

The breathing effort was easily adjusted to my own preference using the inhalation-resistance control, simply turning the knob until I found the "sweet spot" at which it felt

natural and unrestricted.

The narrow exhaust port did send a few bubbles past my face when I was stationary taking pictures, but not enough to be of concern. There was no sign of any exhaust bubbles when I was on the move.

I found the purge button easy to find and operate and it gave a progressive delivery of gas to comfortably remove unwanted water from the mouthpiece without that violent rush of gas that freezes your teeth and sets your epiglottis wagging.

Hose routing was as expected from the swivel turret design, which for me isn't always as neat and streamlined as it is from fixed, angled ports, but I'm being picky here because I didn't actually notice any difference in the water.

Conclusion

Scubapro has evolved the MK25 first stage by adding its XTIS coldwater capability and the all-metal A700 second stage.

It has then added an incredibly tough black PVD coating and given the combo the name "Tech Black" – though I'm not sure if "Tech" is the right word to use, as the second stage cannot be configured for true ambidextrous use with technical twin or side-mount configurations.

Rather, this is a regulator designed for single-



The regulator under water in warm climes.

tank use in virtually any environment. In my humble opinion its top-quality materials, construction and outstanding performance make it more than worthy of its "flagship" status.

There is also something reassuring about using life-support equipment that appears to be bulletproof. ■

CAMERA

OLYMPUS STYLUS TOUGH TG-4 / PT-056 HOUSING

CAMERAS DESIGNED AND BUILT specifically for underwater use are few and far between. There are, however, a few rugged compact models that have the capability to withstand immersion without a housing.

The latest from Olympus has a depth rating of 15m, which can be extended to 45m with the addition of a dedicated housing, and it's the first rugged

compact on the market to record image files in RAW format.

The camera I'm talking about is the newest in the line of Stylus cameras from Olympus,

the Tough TG-4. Those nice guys down in Devon at Cameras Underwater sent me a set-up to take diving.

The Camera

The Stylus Tough TG-4 has a 16.8mp BSI CMOS sensor, providing a resolution of 4608 x 3456 pixels. It features an ultra-bright 25-100mm

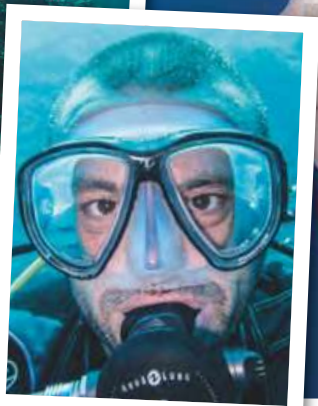


Olympus Stylus Tough TG-4 and PT-056 housing.

Right: Staghorn coral shot at a depth of around 20m.



Above: The bright surface has been over-exposed to capture detail in the shadows.



Left: The camera's flash illuminates this diver's face.

Pictured:
Housed camera
under water
in Egypt.



f/2.0-4.9 lens with 4X optical zoom and a 3in 460k-dot LCD rear screen.

The camera will record images in both RAW and JPEG file formats and HD video at 1920 x 1080p @ 60fps in MOV format on a single SD/SDHC/SDXC memory card.

Native ISO starts at 100 and is expandable to 6400, and the camera's shutter-speed range is from 1/2sec to 1/2000th sec.

The Tough rating comes from the camera's ability to be immersed in water as deep as 15m. It is said to withstand temperatures down to -10°C and a drop onto a hard surface from 2.1m. It's also 100kg crushproof.

Images can be captured in Auto, Program or Aperture priority modes with the addition of 19

scene modes, including five specifically for underwater shooting.

The Stylus Tough TG-4 also features an advanced four-mode variable macro system, and has built in wi-fi, enabling instant downloading to a smart phone or tablet for sharing on social media. It also boasts a GPS feature for geo-tagging your images.

The Housing

The dedicated housing for the Tough TG-4 is built from polycarbonate and has a depth rating of 45m. The hinged clamshell-style back is O-ring-protected and transparent to aid the detection of incoming water, and all camera functions can be accessed from the housing.

The standard optical glass port is multi-coated to reduce inner reflections and has a 52mm screw thread to take Olympus's range of auxiliary conversion lenses for wide-angle or macro photography.

The base of the housing has a standard tripod socket that allows a lighting tray and arm system to be attached, along with off-board underwater strobes triggered by standard Sea & Sea-type fibre-optic cables.

In Use

OK, that's enough of the geek-speak – what you actually want to know is: "Was it any good under water"?

The short answer is, "that depends on your expectations." Serious underwater photographers shoot almost exclusively in Manual mode, which gives them full control over shutter speed, aperture, white balance and ISO settings. Programmed modes such as Aperture Priority, Shutter Priority or Auto rely heavily on the camera's on-board metering algorithms, which are invariably designed



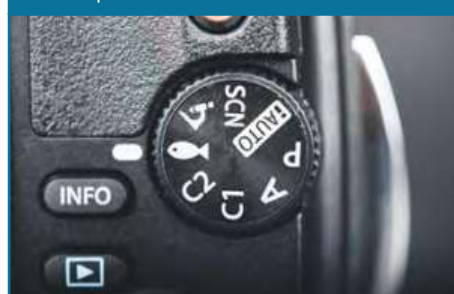
specifically for topside scenes, and lighting.

Shooting under water is a different game. The colours disappear as the depth increases, leaving a blue hue to everything. The range of light from very bright at the surface to almost black at depth appears in the same frame, and more often than not the camera sensors don't recognise this and over-compensate, leaving a disappointingly washed-out, over-exposed final image.

The TG-4 doesn't have a Manual mode. Instead Olympus has added underwater-scene algorithms, giving it the ability to capture useable underwater images in its dedicated Automatic modes.



The TG-4 sports a 4.5-18mm F/2.0 lens.



Programs include underwater shooting modes.



Young Bali swimmer, taken with the TG-4 without the housing.

I took the TG-4 with me on a few overseas photo trips and tried it in various scenarios. In the warm waters of Bali I took the bare camera snorkelling in the shallows, and this proved to be where it excelled.

Using it at shallow depths allowed for lots of light and colour, and with the camera set in Underwater mode I was able to record images of a local child duck-diving off the beach. With

the lens zoomed out to its widest focal length, it recorded the scenes as my eye saw them.

In the Red Sea I placed the camera in the PT-056 housing and took it diving, but without a tray and arm system or off-board strobes.

The camera sensor seemed to cope less well without as much ambient light at the increased depth. Even set at its widest aperture of f/2.0 the Automatic modes boosted the ISO to a level that left noticeable noise in the final image and overcompensated the shadowed areas, leaving the bright portions over-exposed.

In Macro mode the images were much better, especially as the subjects could benefit from some light from the camera-integrated flash, resulting in usable shots. A single rechargeable li-ion battery that I found lasted for just under 300 shots powers the camera.

Other features

Digging through the shooting menus I found that the Tough TG-4 boasts an array of neat little gizmos and shooting options. I found that one very useful addition when shooting topside macro is the ability to capture eight consecutive images with the camera shifting focus on each shot from the front to the back, then merging them into a final "focus stacked" shot with massive depth of field.

Unfortunately this isn't an option under water, as the camera and subject need to be

completely stationary, and this just doesn't happen beneath the waves.

There is also the option of merging differently exposed shots in-camera to produce High Dynamic Range (HDR) images. The same applies under water as with the focus-stacking feature – because of movement.

The variable macro system includes a microscope option. The subject can be magnified 44.5 times and can be captured just 1cm from the lens face.

This is a very exciting feature, but one that I didn't find successful under water because of the lack of an auxiliary light source.

Conclusion

Here's a small compact camera that can be taken down to 15m straight from the box. I know that is not nearly deep enough for most divers who want to record their underwater exploits, but with the addition of its dedicated housing this model can be taken beyond recreational depths.

A real advantage is the fact that if you are unfortunate enough to flood the PT-056 housing the TG-4 camera stands a chance of surviving the ordeal.

For me it was obvious that I would have to lower my expectations and not compare my results from the TG-4 with those taken with mirrorless or DSLR cameras.

SPECS

PRICE ▶▶ Combo camera/housing £575

SENSOR ▶▶ 16mp CMOS

FILE FORMATS ▶▶ JPEG, RAW, MOV

MEMORY CARDS ▶▶ SD, SDHC, SDXC

DEPTH RATING ▶▶ TG-4, 15m. PT-056, 45m

WEIGHTS ▶▶ TG-4, 247g. PT-056, 430g

ADDITIONAL OPTIONS ▶▶ Screw-on wet auxiliary lenses.

WEIGHT ▶▶ Combined stages 1.03kg (DIN with mp hose).

NITROX ▶▶ EAN 40%

CONTACT ▶▶ www.camerasunderwater.co.uk

FURTHER INFORMATION ▶▶ www.olympus.com

DIVER GUIDE, TG-4 ★★★★★★☆☆

DIVER GUIDE, PT-056 ★★★★★★☆☆

With that in mind, I felt that the Stylus TG-4 was capable of capturing good images while submerged using the dedicated UW modes, and the addition of an off-camera lighting system and supplementary wet lenses would clearly have enhanced the results.

The Olympus Stylus Tough TG-4 will meet the demands of most divers who just want to shoot stills or video and share their adventures from both above and below the waves instantly on social media. That is exactly what it's been designed and built to do. ■



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IN RECENT YEARS INNOVATIVE

products have been few and far between, with dive-gear designers instead preferring to refine tried, tested and proven kit.

Every now and then, however, something new catches my eye. In this instance it's an item that appears to be unique yet is simple in concept.

I'm talking about the latest addition to the Apeks range of divewear – I was sent a pair of its Tech Shorts to trial, and have taken them under water more than a few times.

The Design

The shorts are made from 1.5mm neoprene with a small diamond lining on the exterior and a finer nylon lining on the inside. A large (100mm) waistband with a clever overlapping hook-and-loop adjustment system creates a snug fit around the wearer's midriff.

It is secured with an adjustable 50mm webbing belt and quick-release clip. Twin loops keep the webbing belt from riding up.

All the seams are blind-stitched and taped on the inside for comfort and durability.

The back panel of the shorts has a protective rubber print that reduces wear and increases grip to reduce the chances of slipping when sitting on the edge of a RIB while being transported to dive-sites.

The cargo-pockets are what these Tech Shorts are all about. There are two, and they're big, made from hardwearing ballistic Nylon with a hook-and-loop bellows expansion system and large easy-access top flaps.

The flaps also have hook-and-loop closure and are stiffened and reinforced with a Kevlar strip at the grip-points. Inside each pocket are two 50mm stainless-steel D-rings for securing accessories and four stainless grommets at the base to aid water drainage. The shorts come in five sizes and one colour – black.

In Use

I'm one of those minimalist divers who takes only essential accessories with me under water; I don't clip lots of unneeded gizmos and gadgets to my BC to end up looking like a Christmas tree.

A spare mask, DSMB and reel plus a torch and small strobe-light on night-dives are the only additions to my standard scuba set-up.

However, there are occasions when diving deep on mixed gases that I'll need to take my back-up deco and bail-out plans on slates, plus a secondary DSMB and reel and a reserve torch and strobe.



Above and right: Tech shorts can be worn alone with a rashie in the warm Caribbean or with a wetsuit.



All these extras are normally tucked away in my BC pockets, adding to my already oversized profile and creating more drag in the water, with an increase in snagging points and gas consumption as a consequence.

My drysuit has thigh-pockets, and these are used to the max when I take it deep, but I wear it only occasionally, as I'm usually sporting a wetsuit or shorts and a rash vest in warmwater climates these days. It was in this scenario that the Apeks Tech Shorts really proved their worth.

I took them initially on a trip to the Caribbean, where with water temperatures in the high 20s a 3mm wetsuit was ideal. I wore the shorts over the suit and enjoyed the advantages of streamlined diving plus the easy access to the accessories the large cargo pockets afforded.

My next trip was a photo expedition to Bali, and I took a third strobe for off-camera work plus a snoot set-up and a small Gorillapod along with supplementary wet lenses on all my macro dives.

These bulky extras were all stowed safely

away in the Tech Short pockets, secured with double-end snap clips to the well-placed D-rings and snugged down using the hook-and-loop flaps on the expansion system.

They added substantial weight to the shorts when out of the water but the webbing belt snugged up nice and tight to keep everything in place, preventing the shorts from becoming similar to those ridiculous fashion jeans that reveal half of your undercrackers and place the crotch between your knees.

The stiffeners on the pocket-flaps allowed me to easily open and access the contents, as did the grips on the expansion system.

Conclusion

Apeks has come up with a great all-rounder in these Tech Shorts. They can be worn over a drysuit, wetsuit or on their own in warmwater environments and they proved to be supremely practical for nearly every variety of diving I do.

For an underwater photographer they are brilliant. The ease of access alone was a distinct advantage over clipping or trying to stow the gear in or onto my BC.

The D-ring placement was perfect for securing everything with piston-clips, and the way the expansion system enabled the pockets to be compressed and reduce drag was highly advantageous.

It's the simple ideas that work best, as these shorts show. They're also black, sexy (well, kind of), functional and I liked them. Actually, I liked them a lot. ■

SPECS

PRICES ►► £80, £87 for size XXL

MATERIALS ►► 1.5mm neoprene, ballistic Nylon

POCKETS ►► Two, cargo, expandable system

CLOSURES ►► Hook-and-loop (Velcro)

COLOUR ►► All-black, silver livery

SIZES ►► S, M, L, XL, XXL

CONTACT ►► www.apeks.co.uk

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NEW BUT UNTESTED

The latest kit to hit the dive shops

Scubapro AIR2 Regulator ▼▼▼▼

Scubapro's octo/inflator back-up regulator the AIR2 now has a flexible purge cover designed for ease of access, newly designed dive/pre-dive switch and larger power-inflate/deflate buttons. The AIR2 is claimed to radically improve the work of breathing (WOB) and to exceed the stringent CE EN250:2014 requirements for underwater breathing apparatus. It costs £135.

►► www.scubapro.com



Scubapro Chromis Wrist Computer in Lime ►►►

Stand by all you lime-lovers – Scubapro has added a new colour to its range of Chromis computers. Chromis features Apnea, Dive, Nitrox, Gauge, Timepiece and Stroke modes – the latter for keeping track of swim-strokes from the wrist or fin-kicks from the ankle while also calculating distance. The price is £339.

►► www.scubapro.com



TomTom Bandit Action Camera ►►►

Sat-nav maker TomTom has entered the action-cam market with its barrel-shaped Bandit camera. The Bandit has a 16mp CCD sensor capable of capturing 4K video @ 15fps, is said to be waterproof to 50m (with the addition of a waterproof lens cover), has multiple modes including time lapse and features Bluetooth connectivity and GPS. The 3hr battery (Batstick) incorporates an integral USB and micro-SD card slot. TomTom says you can edit and share your footage instantly simply by shaking your smartphone or tablet with the TomTom Bandit app. Priced at £299.

►► www.tomtom.com



BARE Nixi Wetsuit ▲▲▲▲

This limited-edition front-entry ladies' Nixi wetsuit from BARE is made from a combination of 2 and 3mm Elastek full-stretch neoprene wrapped in a "supersmooth" exterior laminate. It features hand-cuffs, stirrups and a Glideskin collar with hook-and-loop adjustment, Armaflex protection at the knees and flatseam construction. BARE claims that the Nixi "shakes up the mundane with a throwback feel of tropical vintage with a refreshing edge". Available in sizes 16 and 12 only, it costs £132.

►► www.baresports.com



Inon X-2 Canon EOS70D Housing ▲▲▲▲

Inon's latest all-metal housing for the new Canon 70D DSLR camera is made from corrosion-resistant aluminium alloy with a charcoal-grey Teflon molybdenum coating. The X-2 is depth-rated to 75m and is said to allow full access to all camera controls. Various viewfinders and accessories are available, along with ports for 15mm fisheye and 180mm macro lenses. Prices start at £2000.

►► www.inonuk.com





SubGear Rashguards ▲▲▲▲

SubGear's latest range of rashguards are said to offer protection from both the sun's harmful UV rays and marine stingers such as jellyfish. Using materials tested to EU UV standard 801, they come in various colour schemes in both men's and ladies' cuts, with a choice of short or long sleeves. Expect to pay £33 for the former and £1 more for long-sleeved versions.

► www.subgear.de

Atomic Venom Frameless Mask ►►►

An addition to Atomic Aquatics' mask line-up is the Venom Frameless, which retains the model's original profile but has a new bi-silicon skirt moulded directly onto the single Schott UltraClear glass lens. The skirt is co-moulded with two silicon materials in two levels of softness and uses gel silicon to create what Atomic says is a soft yet reliable face seal. The mask costs £112.

► www.atomicaquatics.com



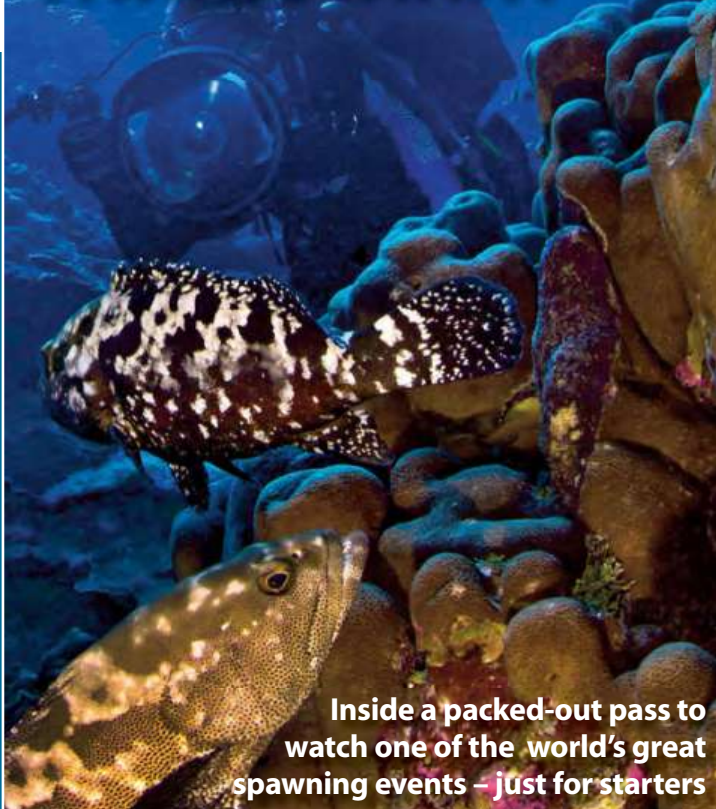
DiveSystem RATIO IX3M Computer ▼▼▼

Liquid Sports is bringing the latest Italian RATIO computers from DiveSystem to the UK. The new RATIO IX3M range features a 2.8in coloured screen with a 150° viewing angle and decompression models that are user-selectable between Buhlmann ZHL-16B and VPM-B. The IX3M also features a 3D compass, surface GPS, acoustic and vibration alarms, automatically adjustable screen brightness, Bluetooth, a rechargeable battery and an O2 analyser. The computers are depth-rated to 300m. Three models are available for use with air through to CCR trimix, and prices range from £725 to £999.

► www.liquidsports.co.uk



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Pax	26	Elec	240V
Cab	11	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	N

CT **DWw**
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www.explorerventures.com



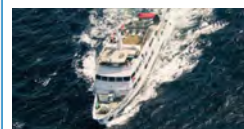
Pax	16	Elec	
Cab	8	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	32.3m	Ntx	Y
Hull		CCR	N

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DQ **RD**
AF **STW**

MEXICO – Ensenada, Cabo San Lucas

Nautilus Explorer

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Pax	25	Elec	120V
Cab	13	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	35m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	Y

TSP **UD**
bo2 **DQ**

AUSTRALIA – Cairns

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Pax	26	Elec	240V
Cab	15	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	30m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

CT **DWw**

MALDIVES – Malé

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Pax	21	Elec	240V
Cab	11	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37.5m	Ntx	Y
Hull	GRP	CCR	N

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Pax	16	Elec	220/110v
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EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	38.2m	Ntx	Y
Hull	Steel	CCR	Y

DQ **UD**
DWw **STW**

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Pax	18	Elec	110V
Cab	9	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	35.1m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

DWw
DQ **RD**

MALDIVES – Malé

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www.explorerventures.com



Pax	20	Elec	240V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	38.2m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	N

STW **DWw**
DQ **AF**

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Pax	16	Elec	240V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	31m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	Y

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AF **STW**

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC – Silver Bank

Turks & Caicos Explorer II

www.explorerventures.com



Pax	20	Elec	110V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37.8m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

DQ **DWw**

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Eagle Ray

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Pax	14	Elec	220V
Cab	7	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	30m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

STW

PALAU

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Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

RD **CT** **DWw**
STW **AF** **DQ**

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh & Hurghada

South Moon

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Pax	20	Elec	220V
Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	27m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

CT

MALDIVES – Malé

M.V. Sea Spirit

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Pax	12	Elec	220V
Cab	6	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	26m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

STW

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S/Y Philippine Siren

www.worldwidediveandsail.com



Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

AF **CT** **DWw**
RD **UD** **DQ**
STW

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh

VIP One

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Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	29.5m	Ntx	Y
Hull	wood	CCR	Y

HD

MEXICO – Ensenada, Cabo San Lucas

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www.nautilusbelleamie.com



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Cab	16	Cour	N
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	41m	Ntx	Y
Hull	steel	CCR	Y

TSP **UD**
bo2 **DQ**

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Cab	10	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	37.8m	Ntx	Y
Hull	alum	CCR	N

DWw
DQ

FIJI

S/Y Fiji Siren

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Pax	16	Elec	220V
Cab	8	Cour	Y
EnS	Y	A/C	Y
Lth	40m	Ntx	Y
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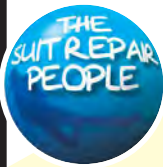
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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

AGGRESSOR FLEET	121	MARES	9
AP DIVING	4	MV AGUSTA LONDON	84
APEKS DIVING	15	NAUTILUS EXPLORER (GUADALUPE)	44
AQABA TOURISM	25/103-114	NAUTILUS EXPLORER (SOCORRO)	52
AQUA-FIRMA	12	NORTHERN DIVER	93
AQUANAUTS GRENADA	40	O'THREE	7
ATLANTIS PHILIPPINES	62	ODYSSEY ADVENTURES	19
ATMOSPHERE RESORTS & SPA	74	OONASDIVERS	80
ATOMIC AQUATICS	88	OTTER DRYSUITS	127
BEAVER	16	PHILIPPINES TOURISM	79
BLUE O TWO (PHILIPPINES)	67	PRO DIVE MEXICO	51
BLUE O TWO (RED SEA)	50	PRODIVERS MALDIVES	6
BUNAKEN OASIS DIVE RESORT AND SPA	58	PROFESSIONAL DIVING ACADEMY	19
CAMEL DIVE CLUB	118	PROJECT AWARE	80
CAMERAS UNDERWATER	97	RED SEA DIVING COLLEGE	49
CARIBBEAN FUN TRAVEL	40	REGALDIVE (PHILIPPINES)	68
CENTRAL COMPRESSOR CONSULTANTS	125	REGALDIVE (RED SEA)	17
COSTA BRAVA SUB	20	REGALDIVE (WORLDWIDE)	121
CRAYFISH CAPERS	44	RNLI	28
DANCER FLEET	121	SAFARI DIVING	22/58
DEMA SHOW 2015	131	SANTI	33
DIVE MASTER INSURANCE	59	SCUBA TRAVEL (INDONESIA)	117
DIVE SAINT LUCIA	39	SCUBA TRAVEL (MALDIVES)	49
DIVEQUEST	59	SCUBA TRAVEL (RED SEA)	18
DIVESANGHA	57	SCUBAPRO	27
DIVE WORLDWIDE	68	SEA & SEA (LIQUIVISION)	117
DIVER APP	118	SEA & SEA (UNDERWATER KINETICS)	125
DIVER SUBSCRIPTIONS:		SEA & SEA (YS-D2)	88
MAGAZINE ONLY	18	SEA WORLD DIVING CENTER	118
RUCKSACK	133	SIMPLY SCUBA	23/117
TORCH	133	SINAI DIVERS	100
WATCH	137	SPORTIF	13/60
EGYPTIAN TOURIST AUTHORITY	2/3	SUB AQUA ASSOCIATION (SAA)	58
ELITE DIVING	139	SUB-AQUA PRODUCTS	88
EMPEROR DIVERS	58	SUUNTO DIVING UK	140
EURO DIVERS	50	THE SCUBA PLACE (MEXICO)	40
EXPLORER VENTURES	100	THE SCUBA PLACE (RED SEA)	102
GO-DIVE	127	THRESHER SHARK DIVERS	60
HIDDEN DEPTHS DIVE TOURS	60	TOP LIVEBOARDS	68
LA GALIGO LIVEBOARD	43	UNDERWATER CENTRE	14
LIQUID SPORTS	44	UTILA DIVE CENTRE	59
MALTAQUA	52	WESTFIELD INSURANCE	134/135



It's time to stop the whale-shark butchery

A recent video gore-fest has upset a lot of divers – but perhaps it can be used to help a beleaguered creature, suggests **RALPH PANNELL**

I'M SURE MANY READERS will be aware of a shocking and horrifying video that has recently gone viral, of a whale shark being butchered alive in China. For those of you who haven't seen it, I'll save you the pain. It is disturbing that human beings can be so cruel – the killing wouldn't have looked out of place in a *Saw* movie.

It is difficult to ascertain how the gathered crowd, many of whom filmed and photographed the activity on their mobile phones, judged the act. Only one person seemed to be protesting, and that was a child who cried out: "This is too cruel".

Thankfully, the reaction across social media and the press has been overwhelmingly unforgiving.

While I am saddened that it takes an event so brutal to capture the world's attention, I hope this harrowing video helps to highlight the huge threat faced by whale sharks, and spurs positive action.

There was a global outcry in part because of the horrendous nature of the killing. Yet hundreds of whale sharks are being removed from our oceans each year through the fisheries.

Stocks have already been depleted dramatically through targeted fishing in Taiwan and India. Now the main threat comes from relatively new fisheries in southern China.

Aqua-Firma works closely with the charity Marine Megafauna Foundation (MMF), operating whale-shark research and photography trips hosted by MMF scientists. "The catch of whale sharks off China is estimated to be more than a thousand each year, from a documented world population of just over 6000," says MMF Principal Scientist Dr Simon Pierce. "The species is technically protected but catches are unmonitored and there is minimal enforcement."

"There has been a reduction in the average size of sharks caught, from 8.3m before 2004 to 6.3m, between 2008-2011. These figures suggest numbers of large sharks have been considerably reduced."

AFTER YEARS OF OVER-EXPLOITATION, whale sharks were put under legal protection in India in 2001. Since 2004, its fishermen have rescued and released more than 400 that got caught in fishing-nets. Perhaps the publicity generated by this video might encourage a similar attitude change in China.

For now we need to give this abhorrent event a

positive outcome. I have recently been hosting Aqua-Firma whale shark research & photography trips in Mexico, admiring hundreds of these gentle giants swimming in their natural environment.

While a few of us can enjoy moments we will never forget, swimming alongside the largest fish in the sea, not everyone can join a team of researchers to learn about the latest threats to whale-shark populations. This video needs to help prevent these threats falling back beneath the radar.

We must urge countries to extend and enforce bans on fishing these beautiful, mainly plankton-eating creatures, so that their IUCN status does not turn from Vulnerable to Endangered with Extinction.

Even when the video joins past viral fads lost in the depths of the Internet, as it inevitably will, the wider problem must not be forgotten.

Out of sight, out of mind? I'm sure it won't be within the diving community, but we need to support organisations such as MMF, the Shark Trust, Wild Aid and Bite-Back to maintain the profile of

but bonito tuna, the egg-spawns of which drive this whale-shark aggregation, have been targeted in significant quantities by Cuban fishing-boats.

That fishing has been stopped for now, and so it needs to be, as bonito tuna are the foundation of aggregations in the area.

A direct threat to whale sharks are freighters and cruise-liners, which often pass directly through the aggregations. While the propellers of small boats can leave scars on a shark, large ships usually kill them, the carcasses falling to the seabed undetected.

One survivor has been identified with its back broken and its tail section hanging behind it, but is still somehow able to feed and survive.

Local efforts to create a large-ship exclusion zone to protect aggregation areas have so far been unsuccessful – there are just too many parties who need to be in agreement.

Difficult though this may be, it is the only solution. Our partners at MMF are now assisting in the process.

MOZAMBIQUE'S TOFU has seen less frequent aggregations of whale sharks in recent years. Changes in ocean currents have been identified as the main cause, which in itself does not necessarily raise concern about population levels.

However, of significant concern to MMF, the NGO most active in this area, are fishing-net barriers, set up in the direct path of whale sharks that generally feed close to shore.

Though these nets don't necessarily target whale sharks,

they do entangle them, with carcasses periodically appearing on beaches.

These nets are set by 20 or so fishing families so far identified by MMF. With targeted education and assistance in developing alternative livelihoods, MMF hopes to all but eliminate this threat.

Further north at Tanzania's Mafia Island, we find one of Africa's most reliable whale-shark aggregations. Aqua-Firma has again been co-funding MMF research on the island through our annual whale-shark research & photography trips.

Tagging shows that the sharks, mostly adolescent males, are resident in the general area where the greatest threat is entanglement by hand-drawn purse seine nets. The process involves about 25 fishermen per net, and all seem to have a positive attitude of co-existence with whale sharks.

MMF works hard to maintain positive local relations and sharks that find themselves encircled by a net are always helped free.



SIMON PIERCE

a campaign that is not straightforward.

For example, three of the world's largest aggregation points for whale sharks experience three quite different threats and potential solutions.

In the Mexican Caribbean, in waters north of Isla Mujeres, we find the largest-known annual aggregation. Our research trips there have helped to take the total count of tagged individuals to about 1100. There are days when we can see as many as 200 from our research boat, and find schools of 100 or more Atlantic giant manta rays.

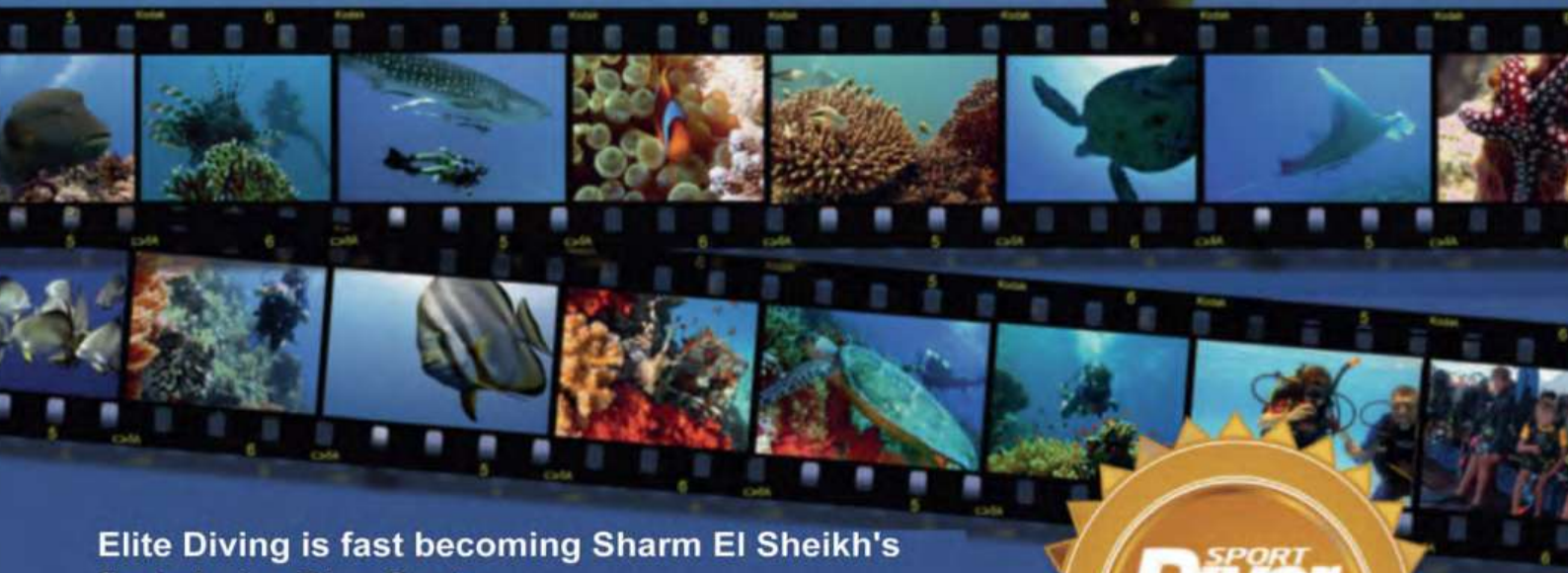
This is a very special area of sea, where we regularly see other species such as golden cownose rays, sailfish, loggerhead and green turtles, spinner, bottlenose and spotted dolphins. On a good day (and there are lots of them), we can have whale sharks and mantas crossing us from several directions, making it hard to know which way to look.

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